

The PEACHERS' Magazine

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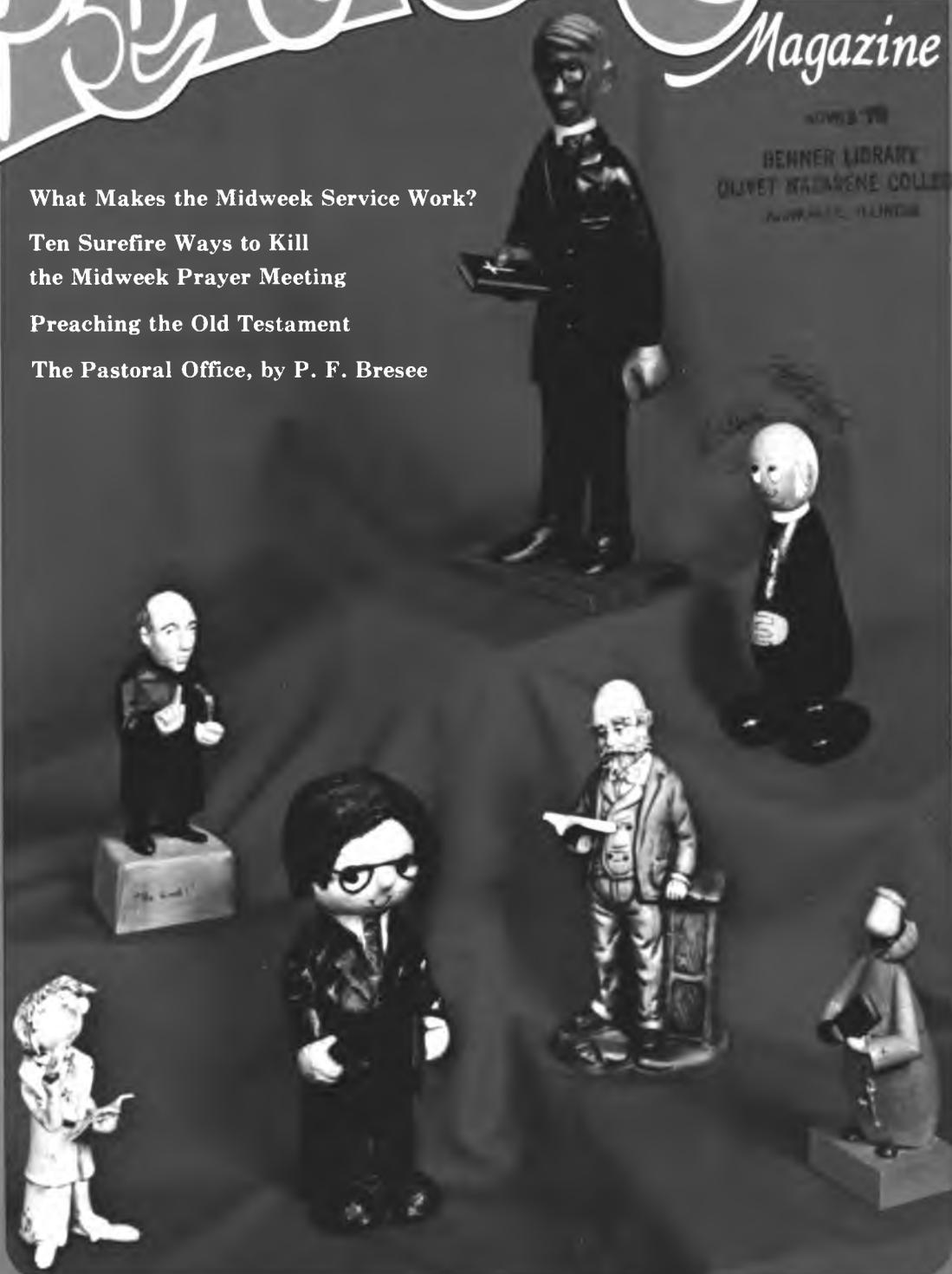
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What Makes the Midweek Service Work?

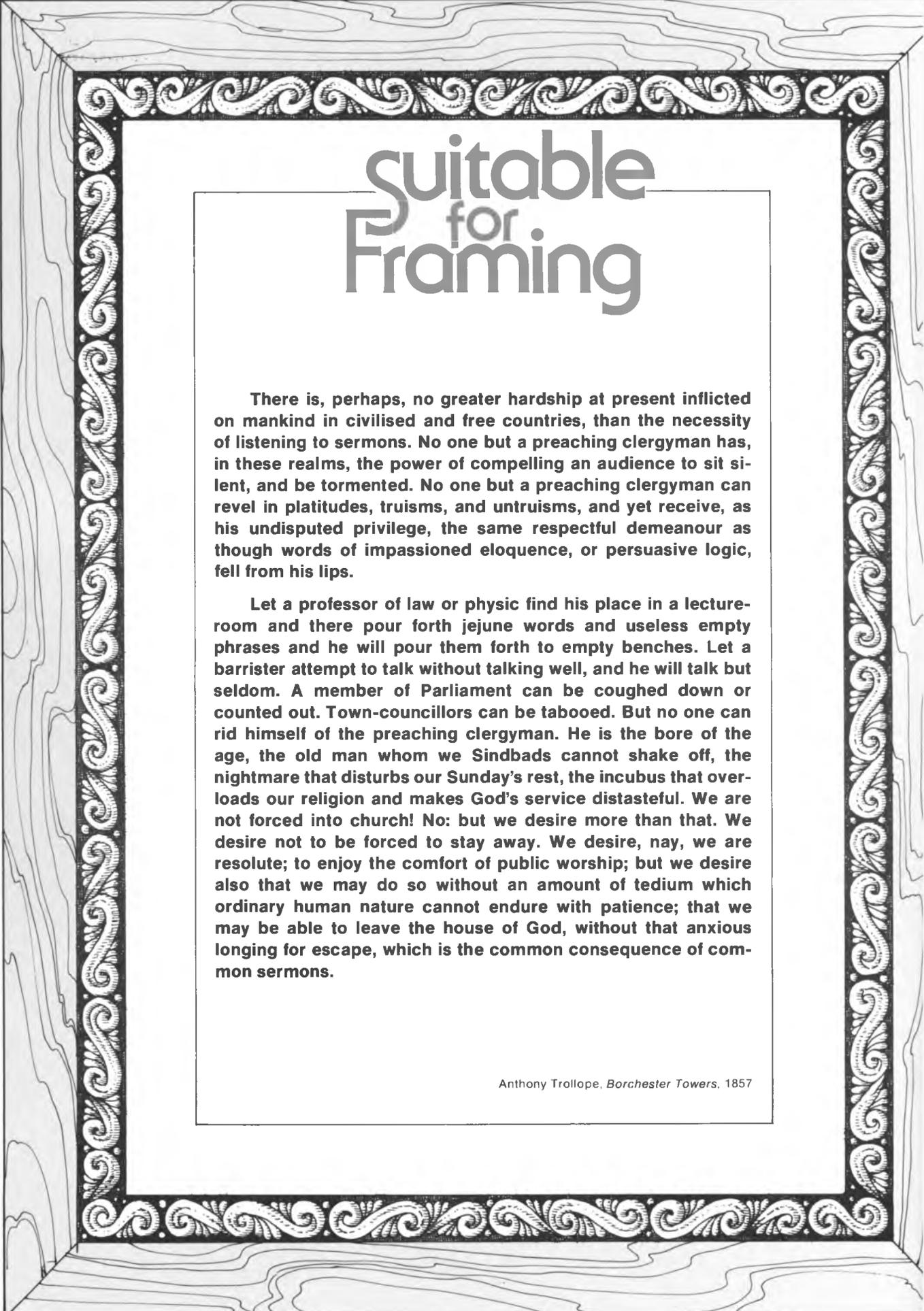
Ten Surefire Ways to Kill
the Midweek Prayer Meeting

Preaching the Old Testament

The Pastoral Office, by P. F. Bresee



December, January, February, 1979-80



suitable for Framing

There is, perhaps, no greater hardship at present inflicted on mankind in civilised and free countries, than the necessity of listening to sermons. No one but a preaching clergyman has, in these realms, the power of compelling an audience to sit silent, and be tormented. No one but a preaching clergyman can revel in platitudes, truisms, and untruisms, and yet receive, as his undisputed privilege, the same respectful demeanour as though words of impassioned eloquence, or persuasive logic, fell from his lips.

Let a professor of law or physic find his place in a lecture-room and there pour forth jejune words and useless empty phrases and he will pour them forth to empty benches. Let a barrister attempt to talk without talking well, and he will talk but seldom. A member of Parliament can be coughed down or counted out. Town-councillors can be tabooed. But no one can rid himself of the preaching clergyman. He is the bore of the age, the old man whom we Sindbads cannot shake off, the nightmare that disturbs our Sunday's rest, the incubus that overloads our religion and makes God's service distasteful. We are not forced into church! No: but we desire more than that. We desire not to be forced to stay away. We desire, nay, we are resolute; to enjoy the comfort of public worship; but we desire also that we may do so without an amount of tedium which ordinary human nature cannot endure with patience; that we may be able to leave the house of God, without that anxious longing for escape, which is the common consequence of common sermons.

Anthony Trollope, *Borchester Towers*, 1857

PRAYER MEETINGS AND CHANGING TIMES

by Neil B. Wiseman

Prayer meetings, midweek service, people's meetings, group intercession, and testimonies—what mental pictures crowd your mind when you hear these words?

I recently used these terms with a group of ministerial students in a word association exercise. They were asked simply to write their first thoughts when they heard these words. Some of the more candid replies included "duty," "dull," "boring," "routine," and one person even wrote, "waste of time."

I wonder what is happening to the midweek prayer meeting. Has the time come to relegate this service to a nostalgic memory from our past? Maybe the church is too slow to change; perhaps the history of the Christian era shows that the church has, at times, tenaciously held to a passing, transitory part of her program. But maybe the opposite is true; could it be that the church sometimes gives up a part of her very essence and in such a surrender weakens her members and cripples the power of her ministry in the world?

Maybe the ministerial students in my word association experience were uniquely different from the majority of people who attend our churches. Maybe their experiences had been too limited. Maybe they were not mature enough to see the real issues. But they are the product of the present-day church. And I suspect their perspective had been shaped by

unfortunate, poor-planned prayer meetings that accomplished little or nothing.

One of the most sobering thoughts about the contemporary holiness church is that we have trained personnel, satisfactory buildings and reasonably affluent church members. We have so much that the founding fathers of our movement never had. But do we possess what they had? Their prevailing prayers in their public meetings produced power for spiritual exploits. First, they did their best, then they met for intercession where they prayed for the direct intervention of God to bless and expand their service for Christ and His church. It was not a choice between work and prayer; it was both. After counting all those assets we have which they lacked, do we have that incredible force which resulted from their prayers of absolute dependence on God?

It is obvious that all of their spiritual power did not result from meaningful meetings of intercession at midweek. But I wonder if they could have accomplished what they did without frequent prayer meetings. And a more pressing question for us—can we?

Now, a prayer meeting, whatever else it may be, is a conscious effort to connect God and man. Thirty or forty years ago, the prayer meeting was known as the power station of the church; we were taught that the spiritual life of the church depended on the

prayer meeting. For the individual Christian, the midweek service was known as a spiritual refueling station.

Have changing times, the fast pace of contemporary society and the television age made all of this unnecessary? If not, then, in the face of declining attendance and frustration about what a prayer meeting is suppose to be, perhaps it is time to reset our compasses. What is a prayer meeting to achieve?

- **Nourishment.** The Christian life is more than a dreary road of compelling duty; it involves all the things we do to nourish our Christlikeness. We belong to Him. Our commitment is to be indwelt by the Living Christ. So attendance and active participation in the church's group intercession experience is not something that we must do, but something we cannot afford to miss. Admittedly, this distinction between duty and nourishment is a fine line. But if the prayer meeting is planned as a delightful gathering of the children of God with their Heavenly Father, the atmosphere of the service is quite different when a Christian is expected to attend because all faithful believers are to be loyally present at every prayer meeting. Of course, there is a duty; but it is the duty of a weary sunbaked desert traveler searching for water and bread.

- **Change.** Prayer powerfully changes people. The motto is accurate, prayer does change things. But check the prayer meetings of the New Testament—people were really changed there. Broken interpersonal relationships were healed; at the place of prayer, the grudge-bearer found grace to forgive and the person who had wronged his brother or sister found courage to admit that he had been the cause of stumbling. And the people of God today, to really be who they are meant to be, must be both forgiven and forgiving. It is not enough to say that a fellow Christian should change his attitude. We must have our self-delusions shattered so we can see whether we have been the hindering cause to other members of the family of God.

At the prayer meeting, how often, as we make our needs and petitions known, do we begin to understand that God works His will through ordinary folks like us? God uses the prayer meeting to enlist people to accomplish some desperately needed ministry. There, at the prayer meeting, God turns our requests into personal marching orders.

Then, too, the prayer meeting is frequently God's guidance time. Often, we take our uncertainties to the prayer meeting. At that special place God uses a testimony or prayer to make His will crystal clear to us. Fog turns to daylight.

- **Companionship.** Modern man feels alone in his spiritual pilgrimage. He needs the knowledge that he does not travel alone. The pace at which most people live produces both inner and outer pressures that make meditation and contemplation a

rare luxury. But all along the way we have companions. The shared experiences of fellow sojourners is often used by God as a channel of grace; we simply realize that we are normal. We are travelers. On this holy way, we have great possibilities of growth. I love Dag Hammarskjöld's words, "In our era, the road to holiness necessarily passes through the world of action." But it also passes through the association of contemplative companionship with the people of God. We are far from alone. There is bulwark of strength among the people of God; as we enter into prayers and sharing with them we discover His strength to meet our weakness.

- **Application.** Some critics have an element of accuracy in their reproof which claims that preaching and teaching are so verbal that the average church member has difficulty applying the leader's spiritual concepts to their life. The prayers of the seasoned saint expressing his need for more of God impacts the new Christian in ways that preaching never can. The veteran's testimony of victory over temptation helps the observing teenager know that God is faithful to provide a way of escape from every threat of the devil. Our serious commitment as a church to worldwide evangelization becomes very clear when the people of God begin to testify of the ways the Lord has blessed and multiplied their financial sacrifices for mission endeavors; everyone is stirred to do a little more. How well I remember the first time a new Christian was asked to lead in prayer during the midweek service. He was so frightened that the only thing he could remember was the Lord's Prayer. But his praying was a victory that reminded the church that only recently this young man had been led to the Lord through the church's public evangelism efforts.

And how could a discouraged pastor find help faster than to hear the people of God calling his name before the Father in the prayer meeting?

To get a powerful prayer meeting going in a church will take more than the same old schedule, the same old lack of planning and the same old expectations of participation for loyalty's sake. How can we make it happen?

Could it be that God would really use our new commitment to gather the people together on a regular basis for intercession and honest sharing? The elements might include a blend of the best from the prayer meetings of your past, a serious study of the prayer meetings of the New Testament, the useful elements from Wesley's class meetings, well-planned music presented with understanding and spirit, a review of the great prayer meetings of church history plus applying the helpful skills you have gained in small-group Bible studies.

Such a prayer meeting probably has eternal significance that will shape your local church, impact the denomination, influence the holiness movement and increase our evangelistic results in the world.

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THE SURPRISE OF THE INCARNATION

by Lance Webb

The mysterious but hopeful fact of our human experience in every generation is that God's ways are not our ways; His thoughts are not our thoughts. He is perpetually moving in ways that surprise even his most alert children. We can never exhaust the wonders of His coming even in the common events of our everyday life—testing and leading us in strange paths, offering us remarkable gifts!

The first and most unexpected of God's surprise moves is the surprise in the manger: the mighty God-Creator-Father-Mother-Redeemer (to combine several symbols of the Infinite Reality which can never be put into one or even many words) revealed in a Baby born in a stable in Bethlehem 2,000 years ago. This is the surprise of the Incarnation—God *in-carne*, literally, "God in human flesh," or "as a human being"—God in our common life with all its weaknesses and glories, its hurt and its healing, its tragic evil and incredible good!

Read again the first two chapters of the Gospel of Luke and catch the wonder and surprise with which the story of the birth of Jesus is filled. Call it poetry! Why not? The deepest facts can only be described in words that sing and tell the truth which cold reason can only obscure. Something gloriously hopeful and real took place at the birth of that Baby in a stable in Bethlehem. To examine these stories under the cold microscope of the critical intellect is to miss the surprise of history's most illuminating moment. So beyond the ordinary words, let us catch the awe and astonishment written into almost every line:

- Mary's wonder and amazement at the announcement by the angel Gabriel of the birth of a Son with a great destiny!
- the surprise of Elizabeth when Mary came to visit her. "And when Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby stirred in her womb . . . And Elizabeth cried aloud, 'God's blessings are upon you above all women!'"
- the adoration of Mary in the Magnificat, one of the most beautiful songs in literature!
- the surprise of the father Zechariah, whose powers of speech suddenly returned when he wrote "to the astonishment of all" the same name Elizabeth had already given their baby; "his name is to be called John!"

- the amazing story of the birth of Jesus in an ill-smelling manger at the end of Joseph's and Mary's journey to Bethlehem to pay taxes—a very prosaic and dirty task in a drab little town on the edge of Jerusalem!

- the wonder of the shepherds who stood in awe before the Baby with the glorious song of the angels still in their ears: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men!"

- the marvel of the prophet Simeon and the prophetess Anna as the Baby was brought to the Temple for dedication!

Poetry? Yes, poetry describing wondrous facts in language raised to the "nth" degree! Several years ago Paul Engle stated in a book review for the *New York Times* that "the glory and the gift of life, joined together, make poetry and only language can join them. Not the heart alone, not the brain alone, for the heart is not deep enough and the brain is not lively enough."

The question is, as put by Jesus, "Having eyes do we truly see, and ears do we really hear?"

The Incarnation completed what the Creation began—a new humanity for a newly created world. This also can be said only in poetry. Science may give educated guesses concerning the "how," but only the language of faith can really address the "what" and the "why"! Beginning in the timeless past billions of years ago and continuing in the present, the language of Job says of this creation: "The stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy!"

No wonder two of the greatest pieces of music and poetry ever written are Handel's *Messiah* and Haydn's glorious oratorio *The Creation*. I have heard both sung many times. Recently on a hot Sunday in June, I heard the latter with new ears, as its beauty and meaning almost overwhelmed me—perhaps because my ears were more attuned than before!

The first part of the oratorio is a musical restatement of the first verses of Genesis:

*In the beginning God made heaven and earth;
And the earth was without form and void;
And darkness was upon the face of the deep.
In the Spirit, God moved upon the face of the
water;*

And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.

Then follows the tenor aria with the chorus:

Now vanished by the holy beams the ancient ghostly shuddering blackness,

The first of days appears . . . Confusion yields, and order shines most fair . . .

Aghast the fiends of hell confounded fly, Down they sink in the deep abyss to endless night . . .

Convulsion, rage and terror engulf their monstrous fall . . .

A new created world springs forth at God's command! . . .

**Who could believe
such a story?
Incredible! Impossible!**

Here, in the beautiful musical poetry of Haydn's oratorio, the story of Creation, the Incarnation, and salvation are joined. This little green planet is a speck in the vast multiverse with a hundred thousand galaxies of suns and stars as large or larger than ours. Yet on this little planet, in a manger in a stable surrounded by cattle, sheep, and asses, the mighty God who formed this boundless universe came to us, was made flesh, and dwelt among us in a helpless little Baby. This Baby grew up to be both tall and wise and loved by God and man. Because He loved even as He was loved, He became "the firstborn of all creation," the new creation who by His life and death and resurrection makes possible "the new Creation in Christ Jesus!"

The Incarnation completes what Creation began!

Confusion yields and order shines most fair, Aghast the fiends of hell confounded fly . . .

A new created world springs forth at God's command! . . .

Who could believe such a story? Incredible! Impossible!

Herod didn't believe it. He was threatened by this helpless Baby and the amazing promises related to Him. He didn't want this Boy to be king of the Jews! Herod was king so he had all the boy babies in the town killed, but Jesus escaped to Egypt.

The religious leaders of the day didn't believe it. This was no way for the Messiah to come, "riding on the foal of an ass," a king on a baby donkey! So they trumped up charges and had Him killed on a Roman cross!

Saul, the self-righteous Pharisee couldn't believe it. He led in the persecution of Jesus' followers . . . until his experience with the Living Christ on the road to Damascus.

Nor do most of the people who call themselves Christians today really believe it either! His discipleship taken seriously is too costly, too unscientific! As the old Negro spiritual puts it, "Poor little Jesus child, they didn't know who You wuz!"

Nevertheless, God's mighty creative Word was made flesh! According to the Gospel of John, "He was in the world and the world knew Him not; but to those who did receive Him, He gave the right to become children of God. The Word became a human being and lived among us; and we saw His glory, full of grace and truth—the glory as of the only Son of God!"

The Incarnation means that when we see, experience, and know God, it is always by surprise as He comes in the unexpected commonplaces of humanity—in a child, a youth, a man, a woman, in all who accept and follow this Christ in spirit and life.

I sought my soul, but my soul I could not see.

I sought for my God, but my God eluded me.

I found my brother and I found all three.

(Author Unknown)

God moves very near us with power for a new and worthwhile life not from a far-off star, nor from the roar of powerful machines, a jet plane, or a rocket, nor from a complex mathematical equation—though these speak of His greatness and order. He comes close to us primarily in our humanity. Yes, God is in all of these natural wonders: order out of chaos—"confusion yields and order shines most fair"; the beauty and mystery in the natural world of snowflakes, mountains, sunrise, and sunset; the design and wonder in the macrocosm and the microcosm—the largest and the smallest; and in our own fantastic bodies, so wondrously balanced for health and life! But the mighty God comes closest to us in human life, moving within us in the same Holy Spirit who came to Mary and Elizabeth, Zechariah, Simeon, Anna, and supremely in Jesus! The poor, the weary, the blind, the sorrowing, and the imprisoned heard Him say, "Come unto me . . . and I will give you rest." When He spoke they heard the voice of the eternal Creator Spirit through the words and life of a Man inviting them to rest in Him, to accept His gifts, and to obey His call. As the apostle John looked back at the experience with his 12 friends in the Upper Room that last night together, he remembered the words, "Set your troubled hearts at rest. Trust in God always. Trust also in me." And John interpreted what they heard through their human friend Jesus as being the dearest message from the One whom He called Father: "He who has seen me has seen the Father."

Such has been the experience of myriads of persons through the ages. "We are to be little Christs to each other," wrote Martin Luther. The apostle Paul said it magnificently: "Christ in you the hope of glory now and to come!" John Wesley spoke of "prevenient grace"—God's gracious loving Spirit in every one of us even before we are conscious of His presence!

*Scripture quotes are writer's own paraphrase.

From *God's Surprises*, by Lance Webb. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976. Used by permission.



THE ARK ROCKER

When Is Preaching Preaching?

Preaching takes many forms. The approaches to presenting the spoken word to a congregation of Christian worshippers varies with speakers and with the social climate. The essence of preaching is proclamation. Regarding preaching as proclamation has not always marked sermon delivery.

The powerful preaching of the Protestant Reformation declined into lifeless lectures on theology. In the rigid formalism of the Church of England pastors were criticized severely for lifting their eyes from their written manuscripts! Little wonder that the extemporaneous preaching of Whitefield and Wesley shocked the staid ecclesiastical leaders.

Peter Cartwright represented the ideal of preaching on this American frontier. Standing six feet and three inches tall and ruggedly built, Cartwright enjoyed a sermonic battle with the devil or a sanctified scuffle with a ruffian who attempted to disrupt his meetings. He appealed to Abraham Lincoln, who stated: "I like to hear a man preach like he was fighting a swarm of bees."

Dwight Moody introduced the homespun, down-to-earth Bible-story-type of preaching. Billy Sunday popularized acrobatic, or athletic, preaching. In his preaching, Billy Sunday often removed his coat, vest, and tie, becoming "a preacher in perpetual motion."

In the early 20th century, preaching highlighted the pulpit orator. The sermon became a religious oration. Due in part to the impact of theological liberalism in the twenties and thirties, the sermon often became an essay on social issues or a homily on human growth. Harry Emerson Fosdick became the foremost preacher in popular appeal in the thirties and forties by stressing life-situation, or problem-solving preaching. Norman Vincent Peale filled Marble Collegiate Church in New York City by an emphasis on "positive thinking."

Today preaching has no dominant form. Some prefer "sharing" to preaching. Others like to conduct a "dialogue" with their listeners. Still others are inclined to "preach their problems," hoping that a frank sharing of personal struggles will gain a spiritual response.

However it is done, preaching is primarily *proclamation*. In reality the preacher does not lecture, share, orate, dialogue, or entertain. He preaches. He proclaims. Preaching as proclamation trumpets the love, justice, and mercy of God. Preaching as proclamation states that man is a sinner needing a Savior. Preaching as proclamation may or may not include sharing, it may or may not flow in an oratorical stream, it may or may not entertain—it should always proclaim the wonder of salvation from sin and the grandeur of becoming a child of God.

The Ark Locker

RENEWING THE VITALITY OF THE MIDWEEK SERVICE



Prayer Meeting (Wednesday Evening) by Thomas Benton, lithograph, 1949

Reprinted by permission of Creekmore Fath

**Here's Thomas Hart Benton's 1949 impression
of the Wednesday night prayer meeting.**

**What picture would you draw to depict
the midweek service at your church?**

Ingredients for Meaningful Midweek Services

WHAT MAKES THE MIDWEEK SERVICE WORK?

by Gordon Wetmore *Pastor, First Church of the Nazarene, Kansas City, Missouri*

A Christian congregation needs a regular time to gather for the understood purpose of experiencing the interdependence of individual Christians in the body of Christ. It needs to revitalize these connections through group prayer, biblical instruction, and sharing real-life incidents. The midweek prayer meeting is that kind of service.

I assume that your church is accustomed to a midweek service involving group singing, testimony, and some kind of spoken word. I also assume that the service has been traditionally led by the pastor and you try to make it different from the Sunday services. I assume that small-group programs such as Bible studies and prayer groups are neither in competition with the traditional midweek service nor do they replace the midweek prayer service.

The midweek service was a well-established tradition when today's holiness denominations came into existence. It was already valued as a gathering of concerned Christians for prayer. Personal life-styles and social conditions have changed significantly since the holiness movement began. The essential nature of the church, however, as a network of supportive relationships

between regenerated people, has not changed.

The midweek prayer service is distinctly different from the Sunday services. The Sunday school and training hour focus on Christian education and discipleship. The Sunday services build from a matrix of worship around the expressions of proclamation, praise, and evangelism. The midweek prayer service, then, provides a strategic opportunity for prayer, instruction in the Scriptures, and the sharing of life experiences.

I suggest three basic ingredients for the midweek prayer service. They are simple. They are profound. They are timelessly new.

They are people, Scripture, and prayer.

The pastor has the joyful assignment of working under the anointing of the Spirit to take these ingredients and shape a meaningful experience for his congregation.

Prayer

We will begin with the ingredient of prayer. There is something encouraging and inspiring about listening to a fellow Christian pray. Each one prays as he lives and our special concerns and hopes come through in prayer. I am encouraged and strengthened

when I listen to a fellow Christian express a concern in prayer that I also have been feeling. It can relieve the all-too-human tendency to feel that I am the only one bearing that kind of a burden.

The sound of a pray-er expressing our common needs inspires others to get to the throne of grace.

Every Christian wants involvement in the church. The church owes to each one of these persons both spiritual support and a place of service. Prayer does not replace the active outreach of the church, but it certainly may provide a meaningful place of involvement and service. Something happens to a Christian when he expresses himself either audibly or in silence in a prayer meeting.

There is an appreciation for group prayer that comes in an experience of listening to others pray and feeling a part of their prayers. We talk much about prayer. There are many books written about prayer. The fact remains that the only way to learn to pray is to pray.

If we have lost our appreciation for a dynamic place of group public prayer, the problem is not in the value of prayer itself. The answer is in the rediscovery of

the power of praying together.

We are called to be intercessors. The prayer meeting as well as the prayer closet provides a conducive setting for bearing one another's burdens. Bearing another's burden often encourages that person to seek you out to be a friend in time of need. To pray together is to be an enfleshment of the injunction which Jesus left to love one another as Christ loved His disciples.

People

People are another basic ingredient in a midweek prayer service. Authentic Christians sharing in a midweek prayer service are living illustrations of what God is doing in the world.

Successful prayer meetings will involve the people who are active in the church. Christians who bear the burdens of the Church have the most to say about God's work in their church. We often turn that about and underestimate the words of the familiar face. Your own folk who are experiencing God's grace have much to say. The basic midweek prayer service will provide for and encourage sharing of their real experiences. When I listen to a friend whom I have known for some time I know from whence his words are coming. The pastor may thoughtfully request in advance for certain persons who are in special places on their pilgrimage to pray in a midweek service.

The midweek prayer service as well as the smaller group provides the setting where there can be a development of sensitivity to one another's needs. A Christian who attends only Sunday services runs the risk of developing superficial relationships with other members of his church.

We train our people in part through things that happen to them in our worship services. We are taught to receive strength in the Word of God through preaching. We are taught to praise in the learning of the hymns. In the same way an appreciation for

the interpersonal nature of the church is taught in a dynamic and vibrant basic midweek prayer service. Other group activities such as Bible studies, prayer groups may emerge from the appreciation of the strength and healing of the midweek prayer service.

Think of the word *enfleshment*. Perhaps the most effective descriptions of the real nature of the church are found in us, the people of God. My willingness to share in the prayer and testimony of the midweek service can be a living model in the development of other Christians. You may wince at memories of less than helpful "modeling" in services gone by but that does not disprove the constructive value of Christian modeling in a midweek service.

I have vivid memories of the "sharers" in the midweek prayer service. As a young Christian they were heroes as they would stand and testify and lead in prayer. I would wish that somehow I could be as they. As I grew in the faith I came to see them as ordinary people who sensed the real value of sharing in the midweek service. As a pastor I now see those same people as being part of the spiritual backbone of the church. They had been nurtured by the Spirit to an appreciation of sharing their lives in the midweek prayer service. That kind of healthy "sharer" is still an effective model.

Scripture

Consider also the basic ingredient of Scripture. An exposition of a biblical passage or at least an extensive reading of the Scriptures is foundational to the midweek prayer service. It provides the stabilizing force. The Word (the living Christ) is present in at least three manifestations in a midweek prayer service. There is the *expressing Word* directed by God the Spirit in public prayer. There is also the *enfleshed Word* as the testimonies reveal how the

guidance of God has resulted in concrete Christian action. Thirdly, the pastor is responsible to either train from the *written Word* himself or provide for the training in the Word in the basic midweek prayer meeting. The informal nature of the service provides a forum for practical applications of the Scripture. Thoughtful applications of the Scriptures will result in the developing of hunger in the lives of Christians to go themselves more deeply into the Word. And so the midweek service nurtures new channels of Christian growth.

This is hard work as every pastor knows. It is worth every bit of the effort, however. Perhaps the reasons why some of our people are not better grounded in the Word is that they have not been instructed in systematic Bible study such as can be taught in a creative Wednesday night service.

This is a call to revive the basic midweek prayer service. Indeed, in planning for the year your church calendar should contain special Wednesday night services that meet departmental and programatic needs. Occasional Wednesday nights may be given to a training program. The point is that there is a normative midweek prayer service that is foundational in the training and developing life of the congregation.

Group prayer, personal sharing of the life of God in our lives, and group nurture in the Scriptures are musts in the corporate life of the church. No novel ideas, films, or cute programs can or should replace the biblical basics.

A good midweek prayer service is something like a well-prepared and nutritious meal. Begin with the basic ingredients of wholesome food which God has provided. God has also given the good sense to prepare the food in an edible and conducive setting. This, indeed, also applies to Sunday services, but, in a special informal way it applies to the midweek service.

THE MIDWEEK SERVICE AS AN ARENA FOR TRUE FELLOWSHIP

by Randy Michael

Counselor, Life Resources Clinic, Olathe, Kansas

The young couple sat in our living room. They told of having been reared in the church, faithfully attending all services and activities, but that there was something missing. They expressed a need for deep fellowship, a mutual caring for each other and the things of the Lord. They wanted to know some Christians intimately, not just many superficially. What did they want? *Fellowship*—as described in the New Testament and provided in Jesus.

Dr. Smiley Blanton's book *Love or Perish* could be paraphrased *fellowship or perish*. We need deep fellowship or we die. The young couple was speaking of their death—and their desire to live: through fellowship in their Savior.

THE NEED

Reuben Welch was right: *we really do need each other!*

An astute observer of the American scene, John D. Rockefeller III, in *The Second American Revolution*, writes:

I see the central meaning [of the Second American Revolution] to be a desire to achieve a person-centered society, instead of one built around materialism and large impersonal institutions which breed conformity rather than individuality and creativity.¹

Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy and Geraldine Spark, highly trained “people-helpers,” observe:

Like man in previous ages, ours suffers from a gradual erosion of the quality of human relationships . . . Urbanization, automation, mass transportation, and communication media contribute to this erosion. The current wide popularity of encounter, marathon, sensitivity meetings testifies to modern man's realization of the erosion of personal relationships.²

This need for *personal* relationships—for fellowship—is an enduring, God-created need. The extra-

ecclesiastical efforts described above are a cry for help. The church needs to hear this cry, both from the world and from its own members.

What did the early Christians do, immediately after the birth of the Church? Answer:

And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer (Acts 2:42, NASB).

They were continually devoting themselves to . . . *fellowship!* We should not neglect any of these things to which they devoted themselves, and for this article let us focus on fellowship. It played an integral part in their lives as Christians.

THE NATURE

The word *fellowship* triggers many and varied thoughts and pictures. The key concern needs to be what the nature of fellowship is as revealed in the New Testament and provided in Jesus.

Heb. 10:24-25 helps me to understand *fellowship*:

. . . let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near (NASB).

The purpose of our “assembling together” is *not* assembling together! The “assembling together” is a *means* not an *end*. It is a way by which we, as members of the Body of Christ and therefore of one another, can be in contact with one another to “stimulate one another to love and good deeds” and encourage one another. That is: so we can fellowship.

The Bible describes several aspects of fellowship:

1. The bearing of one another's burdens and thus fulfilling the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2).

2. The confessing of our sins to one another and the praying for one another so we can be healed (Jas. 5:16).

3. The laying down of our lives for one another in specific, personal acts of care and loving deeds (1 John 3:16, 18).

4. The ministering of believers one to another so that the Body of Christ is built up toward maturity (Eph. 4:12-13).

Fellowship occurs when we, in the name of Christ and in the power of the Spirit:

1. Affirm each other as persons of worth;
2. Are honest about our struggles;
3. Share our life dreams and hopes;
4. Are open to receive from others and give of ourselves to them;
5. Exercise our spiritual gift(s) in close relationship with others;
6. Disclose what God's Word is saying to us and allow Him to minister to us from others' discoveries in the Word.

The nature of fellowship transcends words but it is a provided reality in Jesus. G. Campbell Morgan described fellowship when he taught on Acts 2:42 and told of John Wesley's class meetings:

In his class meetings they gathered together and talked of the things of the inner life, of their failures and their victories, and of their Lord; there is so much in that fellowship.³

THE NEGLECT

A candid look at the church reveals that all too often little true fellowship occurs. We in the evangelical wing of the church have neglected fellowship as described in the New Testament. We are busy about so many things and neglect the most needful.

G. Campbell Morgan observed the 20th-century church and Scripture and wrote:

[Fellowship] means that they talked together of the things of the Spirit; they compared with each other their experiences; they had fellowship in conversation, in communication, in spiritual things. Now that, beloved, is almost a lost art in the Church today.⁴

Morgan continues:

What do we know about the life of fellowship in spiritual things today? Is it not an amazing thing that some real Christian people—and I am not questioning their Christianity—when they get together, talk about everything except their Lord? They talk about the weather, they talk about politics, but they cannot talk about the Lord.⁵

There are a number of reasons for this lack of fellowship. Let us look at just one—our structure does not provide for the facilitating of fellowship. We have come to think that our assembling ourselves together is our purpose. So, we come and sit, facing front, not each other. How, then, can we facilitate fellowship? One way is better use of the midweek service.

THE NAVIGATION

To navigate means to follow a planned course of action to a specific destination. The foregoing sections were to describe the specific destination.

There are various ways to that end. The utilization of the midweek service is a natural channel to navigate toward that destination. However, there are some shoals and shifting winds of which we should be aware. Let me proffer a few suggestions that might help you navigate the ship of your local church into *fellowship*.

1. Get clearly in mind the nature of New Testament fellowship:

Study the New Testament's teaching about fellowship.

Read some books on the nature of the church and fellowship.*

Become involved in a fellowship group yourself.

2. Begin fellowshiping as a church board and staff.

Utilize staff time for some caring fellowship.

Begin board meetings with a time of fellowship.

Distribute books on the nature of the church and fellowship and have a potluck dinner at which time you will discuss the books, utilizing a reading guide you gave with the book: What is the author's main point? List three to five quotations that really "grabbed" you or challenged you. Two or three things you would like us to try as a board/church, or think we need to work on.

Have a church board retreat for the purpose of fellowship.

3. Spend a number of weeks in the midweek service teaching from the New Testament on fellowship and structure some fellowship experiences.

4. Request board members to share in the midweek service what is being experienced in the board meetings.

5. Select a group of fellowship facilitators from faithful midweek attenders or among other church leaders. Meet with them for fellowship and teaching them how to facilitate the small group fellowship experiences in the service. More than eight in a group is too many!

6. Utilize well-planned fellowship guides—especially in the initial phases.

For instance, one time I taught from Romans 16 about Paul's affirmation of the people he mentioned. I talked about how each person has something to contribute to others, that Paul needed others. We broke into small groups and with the help of facilitators we had a time to tell each other in our groups what their lives had meant to us and how we had received from them. On another occasion, utilizing the feeding of the 5,000 as a basis, I taught briefly on each character in the incident. We then had some private time for each person to meditate on the incident. They were to select the character with whom they would most identify, think of how that person felt and what may have gone through their mind. We then got together in our small groups, shared our identification and why and formed a personal prayer request accordingly.

(Continued on page 55)

TEN SUREFIRE

by Harry A. Rick

I feel eminently qualified to write on this subject since I have killed as many prayer meetings as anyone else in the business. Since many feel the prayer meeting is dying out in the churches, I am sure you would not want to go against the tide and revive it. Here are 10 surefire ways to hasten its demise in your church.



1. Never change the format.

Boredom will take over and your prayer meeting will die a normal death. Variety is the spice of life. If you change things you might revive interest and that would never do. If someone complains about the sameness, or suggests something new, you must quickly reply: "But we've always done it this way." If said convincingly enough they will probably take the hint and see they are not wanted in prayer meeting.

2. Never bother to advertise or promote what you will be doing on Wednesday night.

It probably isn't important anyway. Besides, if they want to come, they will come. The others already have TV programs or activities to take up their time for that evening. There is no use giving them a guilt trip by suggesting they should be in the house of God.

3. Do not waste time preparing for the service.

After all, it is just prayer meeting. Your time is too valuable to waste planning a message or a study for just a handful of people who have learned not to expect much on Wednesday evening.

THE MIDWEEK

WAYS TO KILL

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KANKAKEE, ILLINOIS

Pastor, Metropolitan Church of the Nazarene, Kansas City, Kansas

5. Never plan any special music for prayer meeting.

It would cause your musicians to practice and to be in prayer meeting. Your better singers would be offended if you asked them to sing

to the small crowd and your poorer singers will feel they are not good enough for Sunday services. Think what a lot of hurt feelings that would cause. The safest thing is to have no special music on prayer meeting night.

4. Do not use any audiovisual helps.

People might think that you are trying to teach them something. Besides, audio-visuals are for kids. Old-timers would feel that you would be insulting their intelligence if you used a transparency projector or mimeographed a study guide. If you use a short film to provoke discussion or thought, some old-timer will remark: "If I wanted to see a movie I would have gone to a theater, or stayed home and watched TV." Stay away from chalkboards or flip charts. Chalk and color markers are hard to get out of clothes. One must be careful.



PRAYER MEETING

6 ● Make sure you do not let anyone participate in the service or take part in discussions.

They might not agree with something you have said. That would put you on the spot. You want to avoid that at all costs. After all, if people get to disagreeing with the preacher you can never tell where that might end. Keep a firm hand at all times in prayer meeting.

7 ● Never involve the young people in the meeting.

After all, they have so little to offer it would only be a waste of time. They could more profitably spend the evening whispering to a sweetheart, writing in the hymnal, or doing something constructive like staying home and watching the Wednesday night movie on TV. Besides, if you eliminate the young people, when the old folks die off there will be no one to keep the prayer meeting going.



8 ● Make it a prayer meeting in name only.

I know it's called prayer meeting, but really, do people come to pray? It should not be necessary to teach your people to pray, to take prayer requests, or to call on several people to pray short prayers. You might embarrass one of your board members by calling on him to pray on the spur of the moment when he left his prayer at home in his other Bible. The preacher should do all the praying. That's what they are paying him for. His prayer should be long and rambling. That always helps to turn some people off.

9. Never ask for suggestions on how to improve the prayer meeting.

Some bright person might just ignite the whole issue again with a sensational idea. Then it would take you another year to get it killed. If someone does give a suggestion, then refer it to a committee where it can gather dust until it is forgotten. You do not need feedback of any kind to help you. You know what you are trying to do and with a little luck you will succeed before long on your own.

If you faithfully follow these 10 rules you should have no trouble getting your crowd down to the size where you could bury the prayer meeting for good. Then you could stay home and watch the ball games like the rest of the members. The practical advantages of restoring Wednesday night for your own interests are so numerous you will undoubtedly put these rules in operation without further delay.

I wish you miserable failure in your *undertaking*.

10. Testimonies should never be allowed.

Testimonies are sure to be interesting only to the one giving them. Why they should be allowed to take up valuable time and make the service longer is beyond me. Some people who are used to testifying may stop coming, but of course we must follow our rules. What are rules for anyway?



THE MISSING LINK IN CONGREGATIONAL LIFE?

by Tom Nees

Pastor, Community of Hope Church of the Nazarene, Washington, D.C.

Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them," said Jesus (Matt. 18:20). This may be one of the most misunderstood and misquoted verses of scripture. How often has a pastor looked over a smaller than expected or hoped-for group on a Sunday or weeknight and tried to reassure himself and the congregation with these words? Even though our disappointment would lead us to feel that it's hardly worth the effort to conduct a service for so few, we go on—certain that at least Jesus is present. With this verse we seek to salvage something when our own plans have failed.

For years, I never considered another interpretation until a writer giving direction for spiritual development suggested that the presence of Jesus can be known in a special way to a few people who have gathered together to be accountable to one another for their spiritual lives. Indeed, Jesus was not talking about a chance meeting of a few faithful saints. These words are not meant as consolation for those moments when our plans fail. In some unique way Jesus offered to make himself present to groups of people who would be accountable to one another for their spiritual growth and corporate mission.

In this verse may be a clue to a missing link in our congregational life. We have emphasized the in-

dividual responsibility to believe and have experienced moments of conversion and entire sanctification. Hardly a message concludes without a call for individual decisions to follow Jesus in discipleship. The emphasis is upon the individual. At the same time, individual Christians are urged to gather regularly for what may be referred to as "cathedral experiences." In these settings services are planned in which people are arranged in groups where they listen to a presentation by a minister or teacher. The assumption is that the larger the group, the more effective the presentation or program must be and the more obvious the presence of the Lord. There is no doubt that a large and inspired group of people brings excitement and anticipation, but it may in fact prevent the kind of meeting which Jesus promised in the verse, "where two or three are gathered together in my name . . ." Rows upon rows of people in a sanctuary does not provide the setting for the kind of encounter and community of which Jesus was speaking.

While not discounting the importance of individual decisions nor the value of larger cathedral experiences, there is something more to Christian community which is vital and often missing. It is a link which could give meaning to churches large and small.

An example of the importance of this link is found within the Wesleyan movement during the

18th-century Evangelical Revival under the ministry of John Wesley. It is interesting to compare the fruits of the two contemporary evangelists, George Whitefield and Wesley. Unlike Whitefield, Wesley's ministry was preserved because he organized converts into groups with trained pastoral leadership. Various referred to as "classes" and "bands," these groups were small, about 12 in number, and met regularly for prayer, study, and confession to one another about individual and group needs. People who attended the Methodist "Societies" were directed into these smaller groups. The real strength and vitality of the Revival was neither Wesley's open-air preaching nor the Societies, but these smaller units to which Wesley devoted most of his time and attention.

Wesley didn't invent the idea. He borrowed from others of his time, primarily the Moravians. In fact, the New Testament seems to indicate that the first-century Christians met in house churches where a few people could share their lives together. The absence of church buildings was not the handicap it might seem. It was, in fact, part of the reason for the rapid growth of early Christianity.

In our time there is widespread interest in small groups of Christians meeting in homes for mutual support. Most of this interest and activity is happening outside the organized church and is often viewed with alarm by church

leaders who fear competing claims on membership time and loyalty.

Because we had the opportunity to begin a new congregation in 1975, and with our special interest in the ministry to the inner city of Washington, the Community of Hope Church of the Nazarene was organized with a conscious attempt to adapt the Wesleyan model of group accountability. From the beginning each member has been in a "mission group" where members assume accountability to and for one another. Groups are identified by a particular task which the groups take on, with each member of the group expected to clarify his or her own gift for that corporate mission. More important than the particular task however, is the commitment to a community where spiritual growth is nurtured. The groups accept certain minimal disciplines which include spending one half hour each day in prayer and meditation. The group decides on its own daily Bible readings and each member is to name the others in prayer each day. Each one is to keep a spiritual journal, recording insights from the Scripture or whatever notes are helpful and to report with some regularity to a spiritual director, a person who is able to hold one accountable to agreed-upon personal and corporate disciplines.

Being accountable for spiritual growth and accepting spiritual direction is certainly the most foreign of these ideas for most people. While we talk about spiritual growth as being a natural part of Christian living, few of us have really taken seriously the accountability which makes such growth possible. It is assumed that attending services year after year, participating in the organized life of a congregation will stimulate inward spiritual development. Several years ago, in my first experience with a mission group, I was instructed to begin writing out weekly spiritual reports as a way of being accountable for my spiritual disciplines. My spiritual director would re-

ceive these reports, read them, make comments, and return them each week. Never in my life had I been that intentional about prayer, Bible study, and meditation. What I discovered for myself is that growth doesn't happen automatically, or by just attending services. Spiritual growth, as development in any other area of life, requires disciplines and accountability.

lives and in some way are fundamental to the church.

The question is often asked about the adaptability of these patterns to existing, more traditional congregational structures. It would be impossible to provide a blueprint for organizing a congregation around the mission group concept. To begin with, people must come to such groups by choice, not coercion. It

One of our notions is that only those who are accountable to a spiritual director are to offer direction to others.

Spiritual direction can take many different forms. Most of us would not accept the direct confrontational approach John Wesley expected his followers to adopt. Nor are we interested in monastic regimentation. Direction is more often a form of listening. A spiritual director is one who can listen without giving too much advice, helping one to be faithful to personal commitments. My spiritual director is a layman I've known for eight years. He knows me quite well by now. In this relationship he is my pastor and prophet. He is present both to comfort and to challenge. Rather than writing out reports now, we meet every other week for an hour together. One of our notions is that only those who are accountable to a spiritual director are to offer direction to others. Only by being accountable to another am I able to be a pastor/prophet to others in the congregation.

We are not satisfied that we have refined a reproducible model for ourselves or others. Certainly the Wesleyan example must be adapted for our times. We believe, however, that some principles of spiritual growth and Christian community are involved here which must be a part of our

won't work if people join just to go along with the program. The danger always exists that when a few people within a congregation begin to meet together around more intentional commitments than expected for average members the charge of elitism will arise.

Whatever the dangers and disruptions may be, something must be done within the structure of the local congregation to provide opportunity for Christian community and spiritual growth, to know the unique presence of Christ to the few who "gather together" in His name. Almost any group within the larger congregation could conceivably become the base for such groups. Sunday school classes, choirs, committees, even the Church Board could see themselves as more than task-oriented groups. The Wednesday evening or other midweek gatherings could be used to offer people the opportunity to gather in smaller groups in the Wesleyan pattern. We need to do in our time what Wesley did in his, that is, look around, be aware of the needs of people and be willing to restructure our Christian communities around ideas which are both biblical and in touch with the times.

WEDNESDAY PRAYER AND SHARE

by James D. Conner

Pastor, Lakeland First Church of the Nazarene, Denville, New Jersey

It started during our building program. While our new sanctuary was being built, our prayer service was held in a small Presbyterian church.

One evening while conducting the service, I realized that too many people had come out of a sense of duty. Frustrated by the thought, I stepped down to the center aisle and asked, "How can we best use our time this evening?" Understanding my desire to break from the norm, the people began to respond. One burdened lady spoke up, "You can pray for my husband." Instead of waiting to collect more prayer requests, we immediately went to prayer. Soon others were making requests. We continued to pray after each request, always asking a friend nearby to lead in prayer.

The news of a productive prayer service traveled fast and by the next week our Wednesday attendance to prayer service had doubled. In a few weeks it became necessary to move into a large fellowship hall. Something wonderful had happened. Now many people were coming on Wednesday evenings because

they wanted to come. All other services were now being affected because of prayer. Revival had come to Lakeland First Church of the Nazarene through the Wednesday prayer service.

We have since moved into our new facilities. We refuse, however, to move our prayer service back into the sanctuary. Instead, we meet in the fellowship hall. The folding chairs are arranged in a large semicircle, allowing everyone to see and hear the person who is sharing.

We begin the service by singing several songs. The people are then encouraged to report answers to prayer as well as other spiritual happenings in their lives. Often following a report, we pause to thank the Lord. Requests are then shared and we begin to pray for each other. Many who attend on Wednesday believe it to be one of the most meaningful services of the week.

In trying to analyze just what is happening, I've concluded that it is not just one thing but a factor mix that makes the prayer service such a blessing.

I believe the following to be important:

- 1. A firm conviction that group prayer is a good investment of time.**
- 2. Giving the group the responsibility of determining the direction of prayer.**
- 3. The understanding that each person's prayer request is important.**
- 4. The feeling of oneness promoted by the seating arrangement.**

If we are sincere in our approach to group prayer the Holy Spirit will surely be present in our meetings. We believe Wednesday Prayer and Share to be extremely important. Our people are genuinely lifted and faith is restored. We enter Sunday's services with great confidence, knowing there has been a great investment of prayer. I've found that there is a direct relationship between Wednesday Prayer and Share and the spiritual atmosphere in our sanctuary on Sunday mornings.

I sense a desire on the part of many to "get back to basics." A real prayer meeting is a good place to begin.

THE WESLEYAN ROOTS OF THE MIDWEEK SERVICE

by Rob L. Staples

Professor of Theology, Nazarene Theological Seminary

We late 20th-century theological offspring of John Wesley have well-nigh forgotten his significant accomplishment in erecting an organizational structure so well adapted to his day and so successful in promoting the doctrine and experience of Christian perfection. We of the modern holiness movement have kept alive the *doctrine* of holiness. And, thanks be to God, we have, among us, countless “living witnesses” of the *experience* of holiness as well. But when a full inventory is taken, it will probably show that we have not attained Wesley’s level of success in building an organizational structure to guide Christians in their growth in holiness and pursuit of perfection.

In any attempt to assess and improve the contribution which the midweek prayer service is making to the life of our churches today, it might be well to take a new look at the early Methodist “class meeting,” for which the midweek service became a substitute within the holiness movement around the turn of the century.

I. The Class Meeting in Early Methodism

The basic unit of the organizational structure which Wesley fashioned was the Class Meeting. It fit like a hewn stone into the larger overall pyramidlike organizational structure which was Methodism. At the top of the pyramid, both in authority and in geographical spread, was the *Conference*, composed of preachers only. Meeting annually, the conferences “often resolved themselves into what might be called seminars in Christian doctrine.”¹ Then there were the *Societies*, which were local in nature and of various sizes, some being quite small and some numbering into the hundreds, such as those at London, Bristol, and Newcastle.

Each member of a society was also a member of one of two still smaller groups, a *Band* with 5 to 10 members or a *Class* with a dozen. For each of these units there was a *Leader* to keep the whole functioning smoothly. Behind these special groups lay a threefold purpose: discipline, edification, and benevolent activity.

It must be remembered that Wesley’s Methodism consisted of a number of societies *within* the Church of England. The idea of such societies was not new to Wesley. He simply patterned after the model of Anglican societies which had been formed in 1678 by Dr. Anthony Horneck and Mr. Smithies, and were still in existence in Wesley’s time.²

The relation of these societies to the established church was complex. The societies were never called “churches” and their meeting places were never called “church build-

ings.” Wesley insisted that his Methodists take the sacraments regularly in their Anglican parish churches. Still, in one way or another, the Methodists eventually came, during Wesley’s lifetime, to exercise most of the functions of a church, and in spite of the fact that the Methodists were good Anglicans they came to look not to the church but to the society for their spiritual sustenance.

Because they were the smallest units, the bands and classes were the groups in which, week by week, the work of examination, edification, discipline, and social service was carried on. They were the major means of cultivating the holy life. For Wesley, it would have been unthinkable and unforgivable to preach scriptural holiness, admonishing believers to “go on to perfection,” without providing them with every possible practical means of guidance in their quest. On being asked what should be done to keep Methodism alive after his death, Wesley replied:

Preach our doctrine, inculcate experience, urge practice, enforce discipline. If you preach doctrine only, the people will be antinomians; if you preach experience only, they will become enthusiasts; if you preach practice only, they will become pharisees; and if you preach all these and do not enforce discipline, Methodism will be like a highly cultivated garden without a fence, exposed to the ravages of the wild boar of the forest.³

The bands and classes were the two major instruments in Wesley’s “guidance system.” The bands consisted of not fewer than 5 nor more than 10 persons, and were segregated according to age and sex. It was the *class*, however, rather than the band, which became the most enduring working unit for the growth of the early Methodist movement and for the spiritual nurture of its individual members, although the functions of the bands and classes were essentially the same—“mutual edification and discipline in small groups of Christians who took their calling seriously.”⁴

There were two differences, however. First, the classes were not segregated, as were the bands. “Men and women, old and young, without distinction, met together in them.”⁵ Secondly, the bands were somewhat more exclusive in that they were composed mainly of folk who desired an even deeper and stricter fellowship than that provided in the society as a whole, a fellowship in which they “could not only seek strength for their faith, but also speak without reserve of their remaining spiritual struggles and temptations, without fear of confessing their

backsliding into former sins."⁶ This did not include everyone in the societies, the only admission requirement for the societies being a desire "to flee from the wrath to come, to be saved from their sins."⁷ On the other hand, every society member, regardless of his religious profession or state of grace, had to be a member of one of the classes into which his society was divided. Thus the class could be a means both of evangelistic outreach and of nurture for new Christians in a way that the band could not.

Whereas the concept of the band was adopted from the Moravians in 1739, the class was of distinctively Methodist origin. In the background, of course, was the "Holy Club" of Wesley's Oxford days. But as he became the administrator of a new and growing religious movement, Wesley brought the class into being in 1742, simply as a device for paying off a debt on the property at Bristol.⁸ Leaders were chosen and each was assigned 11 members on whom they were to call each week for contributions. In making these rounds, the leaders soon discovered that some were not living as they ought. Wesley then conceived the idea of having each class leader make inquiry concerning the spiritual state of each member of his class.⁹

At first the leaders visited the members at their own homes, but this was "soon found not so expedient," for several reasons, most of which would seem strikingly familiar to those engaged in pastoral visitation today.¹⁰

clear, and the moral life was taken much more seriously and maintained at a much higher level in the societies than in the national church."¹⁴

II. The Potential of the Class Meeting for Today

It is doubtful if the class meeting could be taken over just as it was in the 18th century and used effectively in our churches today, either as a substitute for or as a complement to the midweek service. New wine still cannot be successfully stored in old wineskins. But perhaps there are some features of the class meeting which might well be incorporated into our church life more deliberately and effectively than heretofore.

Most certainly the class meeting will need some modification to make it relevant to the urbanized, technological age in which we live. But it just might be that some such remodeled version of Wesley's class meeting *could* serve modern Wesleyanism well if adopted today. At least, if there is reason to believe that a reconstruction of Wesley's creation could effectively promote holiness today—both the doctrine and the experience—then such reconstruction should be attempted.

The class meeting, even in a reconstructed version, would certainly bear little resemblance to the midweek service as we have known it. Some of the main features which made the class meeting work are necessarily absent from the midweek service. Furthermore, the class meeting, with the features which Wesley built into it, is

For Wesley, it would have been both unthinkable and unforgivable to preach scriptural holiness, admonishing believers to "go on to perfection," without providing them with every possible practical means of guidance in their quest.

The next step in the evolution of the class meeting, therefore, was to gather the members all together in one place at a specified time each week. Wesley found these meetings extremely useful:

It can scarce be conceived what advantages have been reaped from this little prudential regulation. Many now happily experienced that Christian fellowship of which they had not so much as an idea before. They began to 'bear one another's burdens,' and naturally to 'care for each other.' As they had daily a more intimate acquaintance with, so they had a more advanced affection for, each other. And 'speaking the truth in love, they grew up into Him in all things, who is the Head, even Christ.'¹¹

One significant feature of the operation of the classes was the use of *tickets*—"the material symbol *par excellence* of the seriousness with which the early Methodists took their discipline."¹² Each member was given a ticket as a sign of his membership. Each quarter his character was reviewed, and if passed, a new ticket was issued. "But if he was found guilty of some fault which brought scandal on the societies, or which was considered unworthy of his profession, the ticket was denied him till he displayed suitable repentance and gave evidence of his sincere desire to mend his life."¹³ Thus continued membership in a class, and hence in the society itself, depended on continued conformity with high ethical standards. As Cameron observes, "the difference between Methodists and 'the world' was kept sharp and

not the same thing as the "circles of concern," "care rings," "links of love," and "early Christians," which some of our churches are now using effectively. To be sure, many of these groups bear much resemblance to Wesley's class meeting (even more than the midweek service). But again, some of the very features which made the class meeting what it was are noticeably absent from these groups.

There were many important elements in the class meeting which can easily be duplicated in various groups within our churches today, such as prayer for one another, careful Bible study, and the warmth of a caring and sharing fellowship. But the elements which perhaps come closer to defining the class meeting's uniqueness and explaining its success are those which have generally been absent from, and cannot easily be fitted into, our usual structures. We will note three of these elements:

(1) *Accountability*. The requirement that each society member join a class was workable in Wesley's day since membership in the society was voluntary. But once a person joined the society he was required to be a member of a class within that society. And, as a class member, he was accountable to the class leader. He was obligated to attend the meeting each week and give account of his spiritual progress.

Such accountability probably cannot be incorporated into either our midweek service or our Sunday School classes. Attendance at these has been voluntary through-

out our history. But other structures may be built which will incorporate such an element of accountability. It might be argued that our people today, who are finding exhilaration in gaining freedom from the old legalisms by which they have felt shackled in the past, will not tolerate such demands as the class meeting would impose upon them. But on the other hand, there is a hunger among people today to "belong," to be "committed" to something worthwhile. An accountability structure that appeals to this hunger can be effective both in personal growth and in service to the church.

Accountability need not be a burden, but can be a vital element in a sense of belongingness. Even Wesley's class meeting "tickets" were meant as "letters of commendation" in the early Christian sense. Containing Wesley's own signature and a scripture verse along with a religious symbol which was changed periodically, the ticket was a distinguishing mark which signified that the holder "belonged," and also guaranteed him the right of hospitality when traveling.¹⁵

(2) *Confession*. The greatest religious mistake of the modern holiness movement, and her most unpardonable deviation from classical Wesleyanism, is her failure to teach growing Christians and sanctified believers how to confess their spiritual failures. Unfortunately, the attitude somehow developed among us that any confession of spiritual fault amounted to an admission of a backslidden condition, and the Lord's Prayer ("forgive us our *debts*," Matt. 6:12; "forgive us our *sins*," Luke 11:4) has been prayed in something less than complete sincerity.

This was a mistake John Wesley never made. In the class meeting the people had an accepting and caring fellowship where they could "confess their faults one to another" and thereby find spiritual healing.¹⁶ Some of our most alert pastors are already seeking and finding ways within their congregations to correct this mistake. Perhaps a renewed consideration of the class meeting could lend further aid along this line.

Wesley understood that the "perfect" were not the "flawless," but the "*maturing*." To be perfect in love was to be perfectly *turned* toward God, in the spirit of the Psalmist,

"Search me, O God, and know my heart!
Try me and know my thoughts!
And see if there be any wicked way in me,"¹⁷

and perfectly turned toward one's neighbor, in the spirit of a servant. Wesley was "catholic" enough in his theology to know that true Christian nurture required a confessional element. And he insisted that repentance belonged not merely at "the gate of religion . . . at the beginning of our Christian course, when we are setting out in the way to the Kingdom," but also "in every subsequent stage of our Christian course." This repentance, insisted Wesley, is as necessary "in order to our *continuance* and *growth* in grace, as . . . in order to our *entering* into the Kingdom of God."¹⁸

(3) *Social Service*. When in 1739, the next year after his "warmed heart" conversion at Aldersgate, Wesley wrote, in the preface to the first Methodist hymnbook, that "the Gospel of Christ knows of no religion but social, no holiness but social holiness,"¹⁹ he was condemning the mystical notion that holiness is best developed in isolation from the world. The statement thus reflects both his commitment to the fellowship of mutual discipline which was possible in small groups of Christians meeting together and his concern about such social evils as poverty, slavery, and disease.

This social concern was manifested in Wesley's lifelong activity on behalf of the poor and unfortunate. It was an

important element in the class meeting. Each member was urged to bring an offering each week to help the poor. A sensitized social conscience was one of the fruits of the class meeting. Within these small groups throughout England there was slowly and quietly fermenting, in its own nonviolent way, what Bernard Semmel calls "the Methodist revolution"²⁰ which, according to the well-known thesis of Elie Halévy²¹ saved England from the violent kind of revolution which France suffered during the same century.

It is enlightening to note the connection between such a result and the way in which the social concern of the class meeting was directed. Their giving and sharing was directed largely to the known needs in the surrounding community. Such social service and financial giving in any reconstructed class meeting which we might institute today would need to be beyond our "pooled" giving which is sent worldwide. This is essential too. But the kind of social service which went on in the early Methodist class meeting could be *both* a means of growth in personal holiness *and* a force which changed a nation, largely because it was directed to nearby needs which could be seen and to hurts which could be felt by the class members.

III. Conclusion

These distinctive elements, among others, made the class meeting, and consequently the Methodist movement, what they were in the 18th and 19th centuries. This writer has heard scores of pastors, during the past few years, express their frustrations regarding the midweek service and their doubts as to its effectiveness in its present form. There may have been a day when the midweek service was an accurate gauge of a church's spiritual health, but that is not completely the case today. In most urban congregations especially, the church is usually healthier than the midweek prayer meeting attendance indicates.

In substituting for the class meeting a voluntarily attended service on a single designated night each week, we have created some real barriers to preserving the essential elements of the class meeting. If, however, we can find ways to generate accountability, confession, and social service in our group meetings, perhaps new life can be breathed into our between-Sundays gatherings.

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“Our prayer meetings should come in for an overhaul.”

THE PASTOR AND HIS PRAYER MEETING

by Forrest E. Whitlatch

Superintendent, Iowa District, Church of the Nazarene

The “Hour of Power” is the label given by many churches to the midweek prayer service. Some churches name it this because they have found it to be true. Still others choose the label because it has a nice rhyming ring to it.

Be that as it may, every organization has its center of dynamic. For the body it is the heart; for the seed it is the kernel; for the gasoline engine it is the explosion chamber; for the Church it is prayer. Prayer is the dynamic power of the Church. Jesus commanded that the Church should tarry in prayer before they went forth to witness. Could it be that we have gone forth to witness without spending time in intercessory prayer? It becomes the responsibility of the pastor to help his congregation find the “power” part of the “Hour of Power.” The other part is easy.

I. The Pastor Must Be a Leader in Prayer.

It may be trite to say that the pastor is responsible to lead his people, but it is true, nevertheless. If the pastor is to expect a praying church, he must be a *pray-er* himself.

It is essential that the pastor develop and maintain a consistent prayer life. We must confess that the pressure of a crowded schedule is the greatest threat to the pastor’s devotional life. Determine a time of least interference. Make an appointment with God just as you would make an appointment with a parishioner. Keep that appointment faithfully.

The private devotional life of the pastor will reflect itself in his public prayer. The unction and sincerity of the shepherd as he leads his flock in group praying will testify to his Spirit-filled life.

II. The People Must Unite in Prayer.

“Bear ye one another’s burdens” is the biblical

admonition. The prayer meeting affords our people a time to help one another in prayer. How reassuring to know that our brothers and sisters in Christ help lift the heavy burden while praying around the altar of intercession.

Moreover, prayer has the effect of uniting God’s people. The church, faced with a problem of internal strife, will do well to bridge the gap by coming together in prayer. Around the throne of the Father the children of God discover a new sense of mutual interests and united mission.

The spirit of revival within the church can be fostered through the prayer meeting. Every movement of spiritual renewal begins with a prayer emphasis. It may be only a few who gather for prevailing prayer, but, when the Holy Spirit melts the hearts in prayer, love and unity prevail. And this unity becomes the foundation of growth and revival.

III. Pastor and People Must Learn to Pray.

The midweek prayer meeting can become the most formal service of the week. This may seem strange but it is, nevertheless, a fact. By formal we mean that the service may follow a set pattern with little interest and little spiritual vitality. In other words, the people sing a song or two, someone leads in prayer, there is Bible reading and a few comments, a few testimonies, and then we go home. In many instances our prayer meetings should come in for an overhaul. Let us consider some practical suggestions.

- **Don’t let it become a preaching service.** The midweek prayer meeting was never designed for the preacher to mount the pulpit and preach a full-length sermon. The class meeting carried the idea

of people participation. While the pastor usually leads the service, there should be a strong emphasis on people taking part in this service. A 10- or 15-minute message, based on a Bible passage, is far more appropriate for the midweek service than for the pastor to present a full-length sermon.

- **Call for prayer around the altar.** While there is no virtue in a particular posture, there seems to be significance when a group of people kneel together around the altar, inasmuch as the altar is the focal point for prayer in the church. It may be compared to group dynamics, such as a team playing together on a field or an orchestra playing together in a musical presentation. So it is that the church experiences a sense of spiritual communion when kneeling together before God.

- **Make the testimony service meaningful.** Admittedly, testimony time is risky. It can become a free "talk show"—sort of an "air-your-opinion" act. Some have been known to take advantage of their freedom. Others tend to dominate the time with lengthy verbalizations of trivia. But, this is not a valid

capable leader for each prayer group and assign a portion of the Bible for discussion. After a period of group discussion, everyone returns to the sanctuary at which time each group leader presents a summary or key ideas gleaned from the group study.

- **Midweek training sessions work.** A series of six consecutive prayer meetings may be devoted to training sessions on a subject related to Christian life and service. Training sessions should not be permitted to become a substitute for prayer meeting. However, a series of training sessions once or twice a year serves the purpose of providing instruction for Christian service as well as providing a variety in the format of the midweek service.

- **Assigned prayer requests.** The pastor shares a list of prayer requests. After each request is made, people are asked to raise their hand indicating that they will specifically pray for that particular request. This produces assurance that every prayer request is brought before the throne of God by interested intercessors.

- **Plan ahead.** Stimulate interest in preparing for prayer meeting by passing out Bible questions on Sunday. Announce that these questions will be discussed at the prayer meeting service during the week. People will have time to study Bible passages before coming to the midweek service.

- **Maintain a focus on prayer.** With the multiplicity of church functions, it is so easy to use the midweek service for a variety of church activities. Eventually prayer is crowded out and the time is usurped by other programs. If we are careless at this point, our children and young people could grow up with the idea that the midweek service is a time for handicraft, play, and achievement programs. Even if the congregation is divided into age-level groups, a place of prominence should be devoted to prayer.

The decline of interest and attendance to the midweek prayer meeting is one of the early signs of a decline in the spiritual vitality of the church. The church that discards the prayer meeting denies herself the dynamic of spiritual power. This is more than a plea for the maintenance of a long-standing tradition of the holiness movement. It is a plea for the retention of a principal source of spiritual power for the pastor and his people.

A few Sunday evenings ago while I was preaching in one of the churches of my district, God moved in a mighty way and over a dozen people knelt at the altar of prayer for spiritual victory. During the testimony period which followed this service the pastor's wife explained that the spiritual renewal within the church came as a result of a little band of people who had been meeting for prayer and fasting every week. It is through prayer that we bring God's Spirit upon the church, and when the Holy Spirit moves upon His people the climate is prepared for revival, progress, and evangelism. The growing church begins on her knees. Energized by the moving of God's Spirit, the church moves out to win a lost world to Christ. Let us keep alive this Hour of Power!

The growing church begins on her knees.

reason to discard a traditional practice which has been of untold blessing across the years. Frequently the expression of a life situation provides encouragement to a fellow Christian who may be passing through a similar experience.

The pastor or prayer meeting leader is responsible to maintain control during the testimony time. Wisdom and discretion will enable the leader to guide the testimonies and thus avoid lengthy irrelevant chatter. If the testimony service takes an improper direction, break it up with a chorus, words of admonition, or simply change the order of the service.

To encourage participation in testimony, here are a few practical suggestions.

1. Ask for testimonies of those who have not testified for the past month (or some other prescribed period of time).

2. Ask for testimonies of those within a certain age bracket—this may encourage teens or young adults who may be reluctant to speak.

3. Ask for testimonies of those who have accepted Christ within the past few months.

4. Ask for testimonies of those who have a birthday or anniversary during the particular month.

- **Use small groups.** Occasionally a series of prayer meetings could consist of small Bible-study groups. Following the opening devotional period, the congregation is divided into several small groups. These groups could meet in various sections of the sanctuary or in classrooms. Appoint a

Written, edited,
adapted, or borrowed
by Wesley Tracy

MIDWEEK

For Advent:

The Credential Statement of the Son of God

Scripture: Matt. 1:1-17

Introduction: *Who* and *what* a person claims or identifies with in a credential statement such as this genealogy speaks volumes. In this credential statement not all of the people in Jesus' family history are included. Only selected ones appear. Certain selections tell us much about what Jesus came to do.

He came to break down these barriers:

I. The Barrier Between Men and Women

A. Jesus chose to list four women (besides Mary) in His credential statement (vv. 3-6): Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba.

B. This proclaims loudly to one and all that to Christ and Christians women are to be elevated above the second-class personhood of ancient times.

II. The Barrier Between Jews and Gentiles

A. Ruth and Rahab, for example, were Gentiles.

B. This is an announcement that Christ and Christians will see all men as brothers who all belong to God in a special way.

III. The Barrier Between Saints and Sinners

A. The biographies of three of the women included in Jesus' credential statement reveal that they were far from saintly. (See the Old Testament stories of Tamar, Rahab, and Bathsheba).

B. This proclaims that *all* men stand in need of and may receive God's love and grace.

—*Compliments of William Barclay*

For Advent:

The Women in Jesus' Credential Statement

Scripture: Matt. 1:1-17

Introduction: Why would Jesus identify himself with such notorious persons as Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and

Bathsheba? Review the unseemly stories of these women.

I. Tamar, the Seductress (Genesis 38)

II. Rahab, the Mother of the Red Light District (Joshua 2, 6)

She was probably the first, or one of the first, harlots to mark her window with red.

III. Ruth, the Moabitess (Genesis 19, 30-37; also Ruth 1-4)

There is not much about Ruth (except her scheming dating and courtship practices) to fuss about. But she was a Moabite, a nationality hated by the Jews because of the incestuous national origins of the former.

IV. Bathsheba, the Adulteress (2 Samuel 11-12)

She was not blameless in the affair with David.

V. A Question to Ponder

If Jesus, knowing the dreadful past of these persons, still reached out, identifying with them in His own credential statement, is there any failure or sin in your past that could cause Him to reject you?

Conclusion: "And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure" (1 John 3:3).

—*An expanded adaptation (and corruption) of Paul Merritt Bassett's magnificent sermon on Tamar and Judah, and David and Bathsheba.*

For Christmas:

Mary's Amazing Acceptance

Scripture: Luke 1-2

Text: "Be it unto me according to thy word" (1:38).

Introduction:

1. We remember Mary as a parallel to Eve. Just as a woman played a key role in the fall of humanity, so a woman plays a key role in redemption.

2. We remember Mary for her favor with God. The angel Gabriel said she was "highly favoured" and "blessed."

3. There are many "amazing" things about Mary and Christmas. It is "amazing" that God would choose a teenager like Mary for such a responsible task. It is "amazing" that Mary would believe the word of an angel. A modern girl might go to a psychiatrist saying, "Doctor, I'm hearing voices."

4. Even more "amazing" is the fact that Mary accepted the assignment God gave her. Accepting God's call meant that:

I. Mary Had to Put God's Call Above Public Opinion.

A. She was sure to become gossip bait in Nazareth because "she was found with child" (Matt. 1:18).

B. The wedding custom required the new bride to sit in front of her father's house for three days dressed in white to signify her virginity. She was to receive guests and well-wishers. How could Mary, the pregnant bride-to-be, do this? How could she not do it?

C. Yet Mary said, "*Be it unto me according to thy word.*"

II. Mary Had to Put God's Call Above Family Favor.

A. What parent would believe her?

B. We know of no angelic explanations to her parents.

C. Yet Mary said, "*Be it unto me according to thy word.*"

III. Mary Had to Put God's Call Above Her Hopes for Marriage Happiness.

A. Would not her fiancé break the engagement?

B. Would she not have to give him up to obey God?

C. Yet Mary said, "*Be it unto me according to thy word.*"

IV. Mary Had to Put God's Call Above Life Itself.

A. According to Mosaic law, to be found pregnant out of wedlock was punishable by death—by stoning; or if it was a priest's daughter, death by burning was prescribed.

B. Yet Mary said, "*Be it unto me according to thy word.*"

Conclusion: Can we make Mary's response our own prayer?

—*Wesley Tracy with help from Sholem Asch*

MEDITATIONS

For Christmas:

The Angels Went Away

Scripture: Luke 2:15-20

Introduction:

"Twas the night before Christmas . . ." But, what about the day after?

Thud! An emotional vacuum crashes in!

On the day after Christmas the shepherds went back to work, as we too must do. But they did not go back with sinking hearts. They "returned, glorifying and praising God!"

We, like they—

I. Revel in the Glory of the Unusual

A. This is very human—we all are attracted by dogfights, fire trucks, and laughing babies.

B. It is also very important.

We, too, need the high moments of divine inspiration to transform the commonplace and give all of life a new dimension. The high moments make the difference.

Can you imagine . . .

Moses without meeting God at the burning bush?

Abraham without his vision at the oasis of Haran?

Jacob without the angelic wrestling match?

Gideon without his encounter at the threshing floor?

Isaiah without a new view of God in the Temple?

Elijah without the conquest at Mount Carmel?

The shepherds without the music of a heavenly choir?

This is what Thomas Kelley calls "the flaming vision." This is not all there is, but without it there is nothing!

But we cannot live there.

II. We Must Recover The Glory of The Commonplace

A. It is not an idle question to ask, "What happens when the angels go away? Has their coming made any difference?"

B. The ultimate test of our Christian life is the quality and character of our actions, not in the moments of deep emotion, but in the hours after they have passed.

—We may light our torches at the

heavenly flame, but we must carry the light in our own hands to illumine our daily task.

Conclusion:

How can the Christmas vision be maintained?

—Only on condition that we do not neglect the heavenly vision, but undertake to live by it.

—From Gene Van Note, by special request.

For the New Year:

Three Wishes For The New Year

Scripture: 2 Cor. 1:3-7

Introduction: My best New Year's wishes for you include a wish for:

I. Enough Failure to Make You Successful

A. Productive failure in the life of the Old Testament Joseph.

B. Productive failure in the life of Paul.

C. Productive failure in modern times: Babe Ruth (two strikeouts for each home run), Lincoln, Edison.

II. Enough Tears to Keep You Tender

A. On the Sahara desert there are no rainstorms—but there are no flowers.

B. God can make your tears beneficial for others.

III. Enough Hurts to Make You Helpful

A. Helen Keller

B. 2 Cor. 1:4

—Twenty years ago when I was a student at Nazarene Theological Seminary, a young preacher spoke from this outline in chapel—his name was Eugene Stowe. I have since beleaguered at least two graduating classes and three churches with this outline.

The Good Example of Blind Bartimaeus

Scripture: Mark 10:46-52

I. He Had a Great Need—And He Knew It

"Blind Bartimaeus . . . sat by the highway side begging" (v. 46).

II. He Had a Great Opportunity—And He Seized It

"He heard that it was Jesus" (v. 47).

"He cried the more a great deal" (v. 48).

III. He Had a Great Prayer—And He Prayed It

"Jesus . . . have mercy on me" (vv. 47-48).

IV. He Had a Great Faith—And He Exercised It

"Lord, that I might receive my sight" (v. 51).

"Thy faith hath made thee whole" (v. 52).

V. He Had a Great Testimony—And He Gave It

"He . . . followed Jesus in the way" (v. 52).

—Copied from W. H. Erickson who got it from a Lutheran preacher whose name I can't remember.

How to Live It Up

Scripture: Luke 14:25-33; Matt. 16:24

I. Count It Up

"Which of you . . . sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost . . ." (Luke 14:28).

II. Give It Up

"Let him deny himself" (Matt. 16:24)

"Whosoever . . . that forsaketh not all that he hath . . . cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:33). See also Luke 14:26.

III. Take It Up

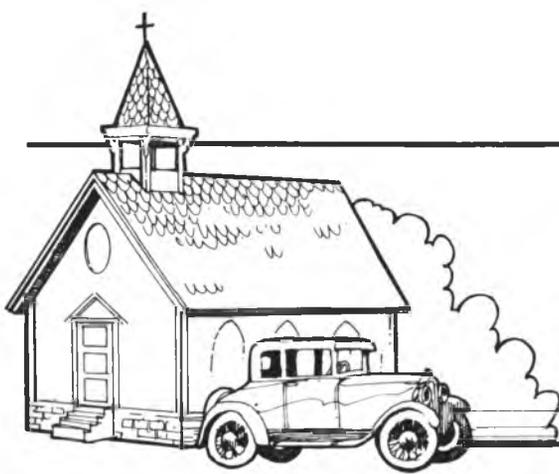
"Let him . . . take up his cross" (Matt. 16:24).

IV. Keep It Up

"Bear his cross, and come after me" (Luke 14:27).

"Take up his cross and follow me" (Matt. 16:24).

—"Borrowed" from a Lutheran preacher whose name I do remember: G. K. Bower.



In the "Preacher's Magazine"

**50 Years
Ago**

HOW TO MAKE THE MIDWEEK PRAYER SERVICE POPULAR AND PROFITABLE

by C. E. Cornell

There should be good fellowship that will make the tired soul rejoice.

When we write that title, we at once lay ourselves open to criticism. But we hope the reader will not be too hasty in his criticism. The "proof is in the pudding," you know, is the thing. Other pastors have tried this plan that we are about to suggest and they find that it works.

To have 25 percent of the membership of the church in the weeknight worship service commonly called the prayer meeting is just a little unusual in this age of many attractions which counteract the appeal of the church. Yet even a higher percentage has been experienced. To interest and hold the young people of the church in prayer meeting is a thing to be greatly desired, and that is quite within the possibility of the average church.

No cut-and-dried program will work. No plan handed down will suit. No method employed by one pastor who is successful will guarantee success for every other. Maybe no other could use it.

However, there are certain well-defined principles that are easily recognized and of these we want to write in a few brief sentences.

First of all, there is the matter of announcement. Just a statement that "we will have a prayer meeting" will not do. That is a fact. We are to have a prayer meeting, but we are to have more than that. The best, most attractive announcement possible should be given the midweek service. This meeting should be so planned that all will be interested. The young people, let them have a part. The mature saints will usually get their share of it. But the "rank and file" of the membership should be brought into active participation. The announcement may indicate this and particularize, mentioning names perhaps, and something of the program.

Then there is the element of time. The service should be brief. One hour is a good measure. In hot weather, less. Keep faith with

the folks, and let them know that you begin on time and close on time. Let no "long-winded deacon" spoil your meeting.

The service should be happy, bright, cheerful—three adjectives much alike, but suggestive. The service should have lifting power. There should be the good fellowship that will cheer, encourage, and make the tired soul rejoice. There should be the dynamic of spiritual power that will send the members forth to a better service for the Master all the rest of the week.

Now about the service itself. We have said it should be brief. But there will be time for all that is needed. Here is a good tried and proven plan or order that may be varied to suit, and from time to time.

Starting on time—the exact minute—have a lively song service. Ask someone who is capable to lead it. Probably different ones at different times.

Use bright hymns and songs. Songs of Christian experience.

Don't just sing and sing for all you're worth, use a little sane comment on the verses and have a story suited—prepared beforehand.

Then call on the people for scripture verses and testimonies—growing out of the hymns.

Take 20 minutes for this opening part.

Then if there is "the King's business" to be done, have it prepared beforehand, and do it promptly.

Another song, then call on one or two laymembers for prayer.

Then sing again, and after that ask all to stand and request a number of very brief prayers. They will not be so long if the people are standing. Make them gather around some subject, or interest, or incident; and group, or individual who is sick or needy.

This will take another 20 minutes most likely. Watch the time, that it does not slip away from you.

Then the pastor's message, and close with the pastor's prayer, leaving the message and the prayer as the closing thought of the meeting.

That sounds a little mechanical, but do not make it so. Let there be spontaneousness about the whole service, but let there be such careful preparation that you will not be taken by surprise and say (perhaps inside) "What shall we do next?" Use groups, use the young people, use the singers, use the lantern, use pictures, use music. Do everything to make it interesting and varied.

If there is any service in the week that needs preparation it is the midweek service. We advise more careful preparation for this most difficult service. It will not do to pick up the Bible at the last minute and hastily run through some parts of it and look for a scripture to read, and then make offhand comments.

The expository method is undoubtedly best. Not too rambling and disconnected and general, but careful analytical explanation of the Scriptures. The people want to know the Bible. It is the most interesting Book in the world, and the one Book least known and little understood. Make its truths live, and the people will hang on your words. We have found that a good plan is to study the Bible by books in the midweek service. Take a chapter (don't try to read it all in the meeting) and point out the great truths, doctrines, and visions that are there. Take a single text and open it up and let the light shine on it and through it. Ask "What does this phrase mean?" "Of whom is the writer speaking?" "Other great texts connect with this one, can any of you give me one?"

Close on time. Even if you are not through with your speech. The people will come again for more, if you interest them. Insist on everyone shaking hands with everyone. Be yourself an example in greeting everybody present personally. Don't stand off in one corner and talk to one person. And you will find that you do not need to have church parties, suppers, get-togethers to bring the people out to prayer meeting. They love to come when they find help, comfort, strength, cheer, and good fellowship.

—June 29, 1929

They love to come when they find comfort, strength, and good fellowship.

WHO CARES ABOUT THEOLOGY ANYMORE?

By C. S. Cowles,

Professor of Religion at Northwest Nazarene College

The trouble with preachers," volunteered the superintendent of schools sitting next to me, "is that they preach too much theology. They ought to be more practical—get it down to where we live."

Many would agree. "Holiness is more than a doctrine," declared an ecclesiastical leader recently. "It is a life to be lived." The implication is that doctrine is divorced from life.

Ruth Carter Stapleton's spiritual mentor, Norman Elliott, says she believes she is effective precisely because "she doesn't carry around a 2,000-year-old bag of doctrines" (*Newsweek*, July 17, 1978, p. 66). She is representative of a widespread movement in popular evangelical Christianity which if it does not disclaim theology altogether, reduces it to a bland, innocuous, simplistic potpourri of biblicisms, psychologisms, common sense practicisms, mixed together with a generous amount of self-help positivism.

Liberated from the demanding rigors and careful articulation associated with disciplined theological work, she can happily blend historic Christian truth with almost anything, as this paragraph in a recent *Newsweek* article indicates:

She says she feels most at home these days in the Roman Catholic Church—partly because nearly half her workshops are given to nuns and other Catholic women. As a result, Ruth frequently substitutes the Virgin Mary for Jesus in her guided meditations. "Protestants would be surprised at the large number of miracle cases I've had with people who couldn't relate to anyone but Mary," she reports. Similarly, she sometimes finds that non-Christians can gain inner healing by imagining good people other than Jesus helping them overcome negative emo-

tions. "Personally, I rely on Jesus," she says. "But who knows, maybe God was in Buddha just like he was in Jesus."

It is not surprising then to hear her say, "I believe that Jesus was *just a man*. . . . And I believe that through the Holy Spirit, God can be in me just as he was in Jesus" (emphasis added).

In short order she dismisses the historic gains of the Protestant Reformation, undermines the very basis of Christian missions, and undercuts every definition of orthodox Christian faith throughout 2,000 years of church history. But who cares? Hardly anybody on the contemporary church landscape.

It is not my intention to cast undue aspersions upon this isolated example. Nevertheless, she is representative of a wholesale carelessness that characterizes our generation when it comes to clear and definitive theological integrity. Even holiness pastors run to and fro across the land sitting at the feet of esoteric teachers learning how to grow churches, design evangelistic programs, discover biblical principles for living, learn the secrets of time management, become a total woman, discover how biorhythms can affect church attendance, and on and on. And this can be good. We are part of the greater body of Christ, and we ought to be humble enough to be taught by those beyond the borders of our own denomination.

What is distressing is that rarely, if ever, is the theological question addressed. It makes little difference what happens to be the particular theological stance of the person or group to whom we submit our minds and hearts, just as long as they can produce the goods.

To ask what is the theological basis for a particular program or technique is considered irrelevant. Nevertheless, every practice in the life of the church does in fact proceed from some primary philosophical or theological position, whether it is immediately apparent or not. And the theology absorbed subliminally, when our attention is focused elsewhere, is all the more potent in that it bypasses conscious awareness.

In deference to those who applaud our emerging “trans-theological” generation, let us candidly consider **the case against** theology (or at least, in making too much out of theology).

First, theology is unprofitable in preaching. “Not doctrine, but the Word” is the trumpet call heard throughout the land. One homiletics professor of an evangelical seminary boasts of the fact that he teaches only one method of preaching: biblical exposition. A leading super-church pastor crisscrosses the land telling breathlessly waiting pastors to “preach it hot and keep it simple” (after all, everybody knows that laymen are stupid). As one college girl said to me recently, “Our pastor is so neat: he doesn’t preach all of that theological jazz—he just opens the Word.”

And so everybody is preaching the “Word”: Nazarenes, Baptists, conservative Methodists and Presbyterians, Missouri Synod Lutherans, charismatic Roman Catholics, snake handlers, gospel radio barkers, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Klu Klux Klanners, Mormon missionaries, and bomb-planting Irish Protestants.

Second, theology is unproductive in evangelism. One of the first laws of soul winning is to avoid any kind of doctrinal or theological discussion. “Doctrine divides, but Christ unites” is the oft-quoted slogan. If a theological question should inadvertently slip into the conversation, the personal evangelist is trained to say, “That is a good question, but why don’t we hold it for the moment and come back to it later” (knowing they will have long forgotten their question by the time we get through the gospel plan).

Questions like “if God really loves me and has a wonderful plan for my life, why did he let my five-year-old son die of leukemia last month?”—questions like that really gum up the evangelistic works, and must be avoided at all costs. We have subscribed fully to the notion that doctrinal discussions change few minds, and theology wins few converts.

It is a mystery why neither Jesus nor the apostles seemed to hit on the simple and slick salvation formulas that are in such abundant display in our generation. Jesus started well with Nicodemus when he suggested that he needed to be born again. But after that the discussion meanders all over the place, and never does come to a satisfactory decision-producing conclusion. Before Jesus got to the heart of the gospel with the woman at the well, he talked about something so mundane as water, something so philosophical as the inner thirst that haunts the human spirit, something so theological as the proper place and mode of worship, and

even indulged in a touch of marital counseling. Stephen’s sermon is a good case in point. He became sidetracked in a long, involved, ponderous theological interpretation of Jewish history which so turned off his audience that they stoned him before he could properly present the gospel. Not surprisingly, the altars were barren that morning, except for a certain young citizen of Tarsus who happened to be in attendance.

Third, theology is divisive. It asks questions examines the grounds for faith, inserts doubts, questions assumptions, challenges popular beliefs, furrows the brow, raises the eyebrow, causes us to hesitate, forces us to think. Horror of horrors, theology may even cause bad blood between brothers and lead to outright division.

Shame on you, James Arminius, for scuttling one of the most beautiful, coherent theological systems in the history of the church.

Shame on you, Paul, for setting Gentile believer over against Jewish Christian by insisting upon justification by faith alone and apart from the works of the law. Why quibble and run the risk of shattering the infant Church over such an insignificant theological distinction?

Shame on you, Luther, for splitting the great united Universal Roman Church right down the middle by posting a provocative list of 95 questions (theses) for theological discussion on the Wittenberg church door.

Shame on you, James Arminius, for scuttling one of the beautifully constructed and logically coherent theological systems in the history of the church. Why question the immense comfort brought to the saints by John Calvin’s doctrine of God’s unconditional and unlimited sovereignty? Why disturb believers’ security by injecting the unnerving biblical principle of free moral choice and human responsibility?

Shame on you, John Wesley, Phineas Bresee, and a great host of other “holiness types,” for raising the impossibly high standard of freedom from sin and life in the Spirit. Would it not have been better to let the good Christian folk drift along believing that they were helplessly and hopelessly sinners until the day they died? That way they could cling to a magical concept of the Atonement in which God’s grace is imputed to them without radically disturbing their particular life-styles. Just

look at the splits and trauma that you initiated in the body of Christ by your devotion to your funny little doctrine of entire sanctification.

Allow me to come straight to the point: there is no way in the world that we can speak of God without involving theology (*theos* = God, *logos* = word, reason, principle of rationality, coherent expression).

The only choice before us is whether our theology is a subjective, feeling-based, mushy-brained hodgepodge that shifts with the best-selling religious books or gifted speakers we hear, or whether it is the objective, biblically based, historically informed, Christ-centered truth hammered out on the anvils of historic church councils by Christianity's ablest and most devout thinkers to which His Spirit bearing witness with our spirit says, "Yea and Amen!"

Let us briefly outline **the case for** seriously pursued theological study, discussion, preaching, and teaching.

First, theology deals with absolutes. Genesis 1:1 offers us a panoramic sweep of theology's landscape:

a) "In the beginning"—There is nothing prior to that.

b) "God"—There is no word greater, deeper, more profoundly vast than that.

c) "Created"—There is nothing more original than that.

d) "The heavens"—There is nothing higher than that.

e) "And the earth"—There is nothing more concrete than that. And all of this is but the beginning (and the *telos*, the end-goal, objective) of theology's proper province.

Second, theology deals with ultimates. It speaks of God, meaning, purpose, and human destiny. All other human concerns are second-rate. They are bounded by time and limited to man's brief sojourn on the face of the earth. Only theology dares to break beyond the borders of time and speak confidently of eternity, and man's place in it. As such, theology speaks to man's deepest spiritual needs and answers to his most compelling personal quest—the created longing for a supernatural fellowship and the desire for eternal life.

Third, theology deals with truth. Almost anything is more tolerable than to know that you have been deceived; or more odious still, that you have deceived yourself. All men are born with a deep-seated, enduringly compelling, unrelenting desire to know the truth. Any amount of pure motives, good intentions, or optimistic wishfulness cannot take the place of that truth which is based on fact, grounded in reality, and tested by time.

While backpacking one recent summer, we set out on the John Muir Trail heading for Evolution Valley. After crossing a stream we came to a juncture in the trail. Not being sure which one led to the valley, we asked a couple of scruffy mountain men resting near the junction. They pointed to the right.

It appeared to be the widest and most travelled fork. Furthermore, we saw two other hikers already some distance up the trail. Confidently we set out.

Soon our wide trail narrowed, and then disappeared altogether. After clawing and bushwacking up a steep slope for the better part of an hour—hoping to find the trail again, we finally found ourselves blocked in at the base of a box canyon with unscalable perpendicular granite walls. By this time we had caught up with the hikers who were ahead of us. Grudgingly we admitted that we had been given a false steer, and carefully began to pick our way back down the slope.

My friend, Jim, stumbled and rolled end-over-end down the hill over jagged granite slabs. I raced to his side. Incredibly, he escaped with only minor cuts and bruises. After patching him up, I went through the humiliating procedure of digging the map out of my pocket. Sure enough, we were going in exactly the opposite direction of Evolution Valley. Even if we had rock climbing gear to scale those towering cliffs, there was no way in a thousand years that we could ever have gotten to our destination going in that direction.

"There is a way which seems right to a man," says the seer, "but its end is the way of death" (Proverbs 14:12, RSV.)* All roads do not lead to the same place.

As Aristotle pointed out, there are an infinite number of ways of missing the target, but only one way to hit it. There are many ways to be wrong, but only one way to be right.

All Christian theology stands or falls upon the truth that is revealed in the person and work of Jesus who said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me" (John 14:6, RSV). If Jesus is uniquely, fully, and finally *the Son of God*, then the perennial and compelling task of theology is to measure everything in the realm of human experience against that standard of revealed truth.

The closer I get to people, the more impressed am I by the earnestness of their quest for truth. They are hungry for something more than pious platitudes and simplistic slogans. They are asking hard questions about complex issues, and they want to be taken seriously as mature seekers after the deep things of God. I am finding them to be patient when together we confront those mysteries beyond which the human understanding cannot go. Nevertheless, they are restless to learn and grasp all they can about the profound implications of revealed truth. And most of all, our people want to work through the faith given to them by the fathers until it is *their* faith, *their* conviction, *their* confidence. They want to say with Luther, "Here I stand, so help me God!"

Alexander Solzhenitsyn concludes his Nobel prize lecture with these words: "The simple step of a simple courageous man is not to partake in falsehood. . . . One work of truth shall outweigh the whole world."

*From the *Revised Standard Version of the Bible*, copyrighted 1946, 1952, © 1971, 1973. Used by permission.

More people today are unreached by the gospel than when Paul began his missionary journeys.

LEAVE MY WORD ALONE!

by Howard Culbertson

I am a missionary, a missionary for the Church of the Nazarene in Italy. And I am proud (sanctified proud) of my title, “missionary.”

Some of you, however, keep messing around with my word. And that bothers me. Not just for my own sake, but also for what we might be doing to the worldwide mission of the church.

“Missionary” is a word that has been used to label a specific calling and gift in the Body of Christ. It does not mean just isolated or difficult or even far away. Rather, “missionary” has to do with cross-cultural evangelism. It has to do with pioneer church planting in those 17,000 cultures on our planet which remain virtually without churches among them.

Of late, an increasing number of people, who really ought to know better, have been trying to transfer some of the imagined “romance” of *missionary* to the pastorate or to other types of ministry. And that attempted transfer does bother me.

Undoubtedly, the word *missionary* has been too glorified in the past. And some pastors and other people ministering in really difficult situations have received less than their due. But let's not dilute down and ruin a good word in our attempts just to even up the “glory.”

I've also heard the word *missionary* applied to every Christian. And I must confess that as a college student I even preached some sermons on that very theme. But that's wrong. Not every Christian is involved in cross-cultural evangelism or in pioneer church planting. According to Acts 1:8, every Christian is, or should be a witness. But not necessarily a missionary.

Most believers just wouldn't function well in a *missionary* situation which would force them to live

with and minister to people whose culture and perhaps even language may be radically different from their own. Just as not every Christian is a pastor or an evangelist or even a teacher, so not every Christian is a missionary! No adequate analysis of the functioning of the Body of Christ will allow for that broad a definition for *missionary*. Using the somewhat exotic label of *missionary* to motivate Christians to be effective witnesses is a mistake.

All of this is not to say we don't need more missionaries. We do. Lots of them. Our own Nazarene missionary force needs to be drastically increased beyond the size where it has leveled off for the last few years.

While modern missions have had astounding success, there are still huge groups of people without the gospel of Christ. Astoundingly, more people today are unreached by the gospel than when Paul began his missionary journeys.

Most of these people will never be touched by the evangelistic efforts of local churches. You see, the truth is: even if every Christian in the world were to win his neighbor to Christ, there would still be over 2 billion non-Christians left. These 2 billion people are hidden behind the closed doors of culture where only Holy Spirit-called-and-gifted missionaries using missionary methods can reach them. That's over half the world who may never experience the hope of the gospel.

So you leave my word alone. *Missionary* is a valid, specific calling in the church, not a common umbrella term for all Christians. The *missionary* concept is the church's way of insuring that we're concerned not only about our neighbors—but also about those 2 billion people locked behind complex cultural barriers, people among whom churches must still be planted!

SEEN & NOTED



“O clear conscience! How a little failing does wound thee sore!”

—Dante

“God never leaves off making; as it is the property of fire to burn and of snow to chill, so it is of God to create.”

—Philo

“The fact that the name of Jesus is invoked does not mean that a prayer really is in the name of Jesus. But it means I must pray in such a manner that I dare name Jesus in my prayer, that is to say, think of Him, think His holy will together with what I am praying.”

—Soren Kierkegaard

“As I write this a madman is howling in the next room. And I am howling with him inside of me, howling for my lost integrity, sundered from God, Man and myself, shattered in body, mind and spirit, yearning for two clasped hands to usher in the great miracle—the unity of my being.”

—George MacDonald

If there is no God, and everything is permitted, the first thing permitted is despair.”

—Francois Mauriac

“There are two kinds of people—those who bring gifts to God in order to secure His blessing, and those who adore Him because they are already secure in His blessing.”

—Karl Olsson

“Brown bread and the gospel is good fare.”

—Matthew Henry

“We promise according to our hopes, and perform according to our fears.”

—La Rochefoucauld

“The devil did grin, for his darling sin
Is pride that apes humility.”

—Coleridge

“To show an unfelt sorrow is an office which the false man does easy.”

—Shakespeare

“A man's ignorance is . . . his private property and as precious in his own eyes as his family Bible.”

—Oliver Wendell Holmes

“That man is admired above all men, who is not influenced by money.”

—Cicero

“Theology forgets that the wind of the Spirit blows where it wills . . . But theology now supposes it can deal with the Spirit as though it had hired Him or even attained possession of Him . . . as the premise of its own declarations . . . [Such] a theology . . . can only be unspiritual . . . Only where the Spirit is sighed, cried and prayed for does He become present and newly active.”

—Karl Barth

“Anger deprives a sage of his wisdom and a prophet of his vision.”

—The Talmud

“The New Testament, given a fair hearing, does not need me or anyone else to defend it. It has the proper ring for anyone who has not lost his ear for truth.”

—J. B. Phillips

“Religion is the lifeblood of the full self, the deepest necessity, the most imperious hunger of man.”

—Thomas R. Kelley

“Lord, I do fear
Thou’st made the world too beautiful this year.
My soul is all but out of me . . .”

—Edna St. Vincent Millay

“Every prayer reduces itself to this: ‘Great God, grant that twice two be not four.’”

—Ivan Turgenev

“The proud hate pride—in others.”

—Benjamin Franklin

“Over-daring is as great a vice as over-fearing.”

—Ben Jonson

“Sweet is the remembrance of troubles when you are in safety.”

—Euripides

Nazarene

UPDATE

Compiled by James G. Wilcox,
Department of Education and the Ministry

What about the Midweek Prayer Meeting?



In the past, most of us have just naturally assumed that the institution of the midweek prayer meeting was here to stay. But today some are beginning to wonder.

Recently, one pastor, in speaking about his own church, bluntly admitted, "The midweek prayer meeting does not seem important to the people." Another pastor in a large metropolitan area said, "Out of the three weekly worship experiences in our church, I have found that the midweek service is the most difficult to maintain in a sustained momentum."

Such things as the increasing tempo of modern life, the distances people live from the church, and the wear and tear of business and professional life upon our people combine to make the midweek prayer meeting more difficult to maintain.

Everybody is in favor of the prayer meeting. In speaking of the prayer meeting, one churchman said, "The prayer meeting is still indispensable to the life of the church."

Pastors make comments like these: "The midweek prayer meeting is still the key service in a Christ-centered, soul-winning church." "My prayer meeting crowd is still the backbone of my church." "As the prayer meeting goes, so goes the rest of the church." "We feel that the prayer meeting in the life of the church is its lifeblood."

One would like to believe that anything so important would continue to thrive and prosper on its own momentum. But such is not the case. Like every other worthy cause in the church it requires action, discipline, and perseverance to maintain a vital and dynamic midweek prayer meeting.

Perhaps we need to hear C. S. Lewis's words, "We

have a tendency to think, but not to act. We have a tendency to feel, but not to act. If we go on thinking and feeling without acting, we soon are unable to act."

The fact that there are churches with vital, powerful, and well-attended prayer meetings makes me believe that it is not presumptuous to expect the midweek prayer meeting to flourish everywhere. We must admit that many have stopped attending. Others continue out of a sense of duty or of guilt. Yet we all give full endorsement to the value, the influence, and the power of Spirit-blessed and Spirit-anointed prayer.

What is the key to successful, dynamic prayer meetings? Is it programs? Is it special talent? What can be done to turn sagging attendance and listless meetings into vibrant and Spirit-anointed times of breakthrough?

The answers that I will attempt to give you are not mine. They come from a number of successful pastors who are grappling with this and many other problems of pastoral work.

One pastor frankly admitted, "The pastor is the key. As pastor, I must be 'renewed' and prepared as the 'vessel.'" Here's a good starting place—the pastor. His burden, his concern, his preparation, and the sense of the importance he attaches to this meeting make the difference! If the prayer meeting is important to him, the people are more likely to respond and attend with expectancy.

Some years ago, I knew a pastor in a medium-sized church who became excited about prayer meeting attendance. He challenged his people to have 100 people in prayer meeting for six weeks. His emphasis generated enthusiasm. An official count was taken each Wednesday evening. It produced results which benefited the whole church.

But there's more to prayer meetings than the number who attend. The Bible and the pages of history are studded with the victories wrought by the "two or three"

who are gathered in His name as well as the individual who was willing "to stand in the gap."

Here's a discovery made by one pastor, "It dawned on me several years ago that among the other necessary ingredients of a prayer meeting ought to be *prayer*." This "brilliant" deduction has brought some amazing answers to prayer. Another pastor expressed the yearning of his heart, "We need more old-fashioned 'soul travail.'"

Samuel Chadwick is quoted as saying, "Satan's greatest aim is to destroy our prayer lives. Satan is not afraid of prayerless study, prayerless work, or prayerless religion . . . but he will tremble when we pray."

To help his people get under the burden of true, heart-felt corporate prayer, one pastor periodically brings his people around the altar of the church for united, concerted prayer.

"Prayer is work," said a noted writer on the subject of prayer. With all the "programs," "special features," and "outside talent" to which the average church is exposed, we could very easily lose the reality of genuine intercession. No congregation can long exist as a vibrant, blessed, and victorious body without frequent times of intercession when the people are "in one accord" and in unity as the early Christians were in the Book of Acts.

As churches grow in size, many pastors feel that it becomes more impractical to have all age-groups meeting together. Some are successfully following the practice of having one meeting for all age-groups and they have some very good reasons to support this practice. Many churches who conduct separate age-group prayer meetings will come together at scheduled intervals. In addition to the "regular" prayer meeting, many of our churches are providing special "vigils" of prayer among various groups of the church so that there is a constant "incense petition to God" arising from that congregation.

I have been impressed by the number of pastors who insist that a successful prayer meeting must have "a good in-depth message from God's Word." The people "need and want to be fed." Another said, "We stay close to the Word . . . and as we do this the service 'lives'; as we get away from scriptural exposition, it begins to sag almost immediately."

One pastor looks at the prayer meeting as an "opportunity." He says it is:

... an opportunity to look deeply into the Word;

... an opportunity to share burdens—with each other and the Lord;

... an opportunity to share blessings that God has bestowed.

Here are a few suggestions recommended by pastors who are providing variety and content in their prayer meeting program.

1. "In the year 1979, as a pastor's program, I am highlighting 'total Commitment and the Prayer Life of the Church'—home and individual. In our Wednesday night program we are having much more prayer and about a 12-minute sermonette with an outline. This is pretty well preached rather than a low-key discussion. Also, we use the altar very heavily for prayer about special

needs, and by that I mean we have people come forward representing those needs."

2. "We try to vary the program. Right now we are going through the book of James, verse by verse. After arriving in a church, I take a year to go through my biblical theology notes. I give all the adults a syllabus and take about a year to go through this, trying to put it down on the 'bottom shelf' to make sure they know the basic Christian beliefs. Laymen tell me they appreciate something more than the usual 'peptalk' and need to get their teeth into something solid. Once in a while, I give a short oral quiz on my sermons from the previous Sunday in an attempt to put the sermon in 'overalls.' (What was the topic, text, main points, etc.?)"

3. "The prayer meeting must have four essential elements:

"a. *Bible Study* must be made alive by involving those who are present. Questions should be asked and discussion should be encouraged. The Scripture must be made relevant and practical to modern living.

"b. Sufficient *time* should be given to the sharing of blessings and victories. People should be encouraged to know that others need to share and rejoice in their victories. Sharing should also include burdens and needs which will generate a spirit of caring and helpfulness.

"c. The third element is that of *prayer*. Someone has said, 'the real church is the prayer meeting.' It is essential that the people of the church pray together. This was the common practice of the Early Church. The more individuals who can actually pray—even a sentence prayer—the more meaningful the service can be. Sometimes the group can be divided into several smaller groups to facilitate more participation in prayer.

"d. The fourth element is that of *praise*. Songs and choruses sung should be lifting and full of praise to God. Time should be taken to share the words and make the singing a meaningful experience and expression of praise and worship."

What about the midweek prayer meeting in your church? Is it alive and well? It can be—with your planning and concern plus the enabling power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

Here is the parting thought of one pastor who carries a genuine burden for the welfare of our church. "I do hope our Nazarenes will not forget the lessons from history. One of the first services that the Methodist church left off was the midweek prayer meeting."

—General Superintendent George Coulter

The Preacher's Magazine

The editorial chair is supported by the wise counsel of a rotating editorial advisory board. Each issue of the new *Preacher's Magazine* will accent a theme. An advisory board of people with expertise on the subject is recruited to tell the editorial staff what needs to be said about the theme. Serving without pay, the editorial board pictured below helped us put together this issue on *Reviving the Prayer Meeting*. A riotous burst of applause is due these gentlemen.

The theme we are planning for our next issue of *Preacher's Magazine* is WORSHIP.



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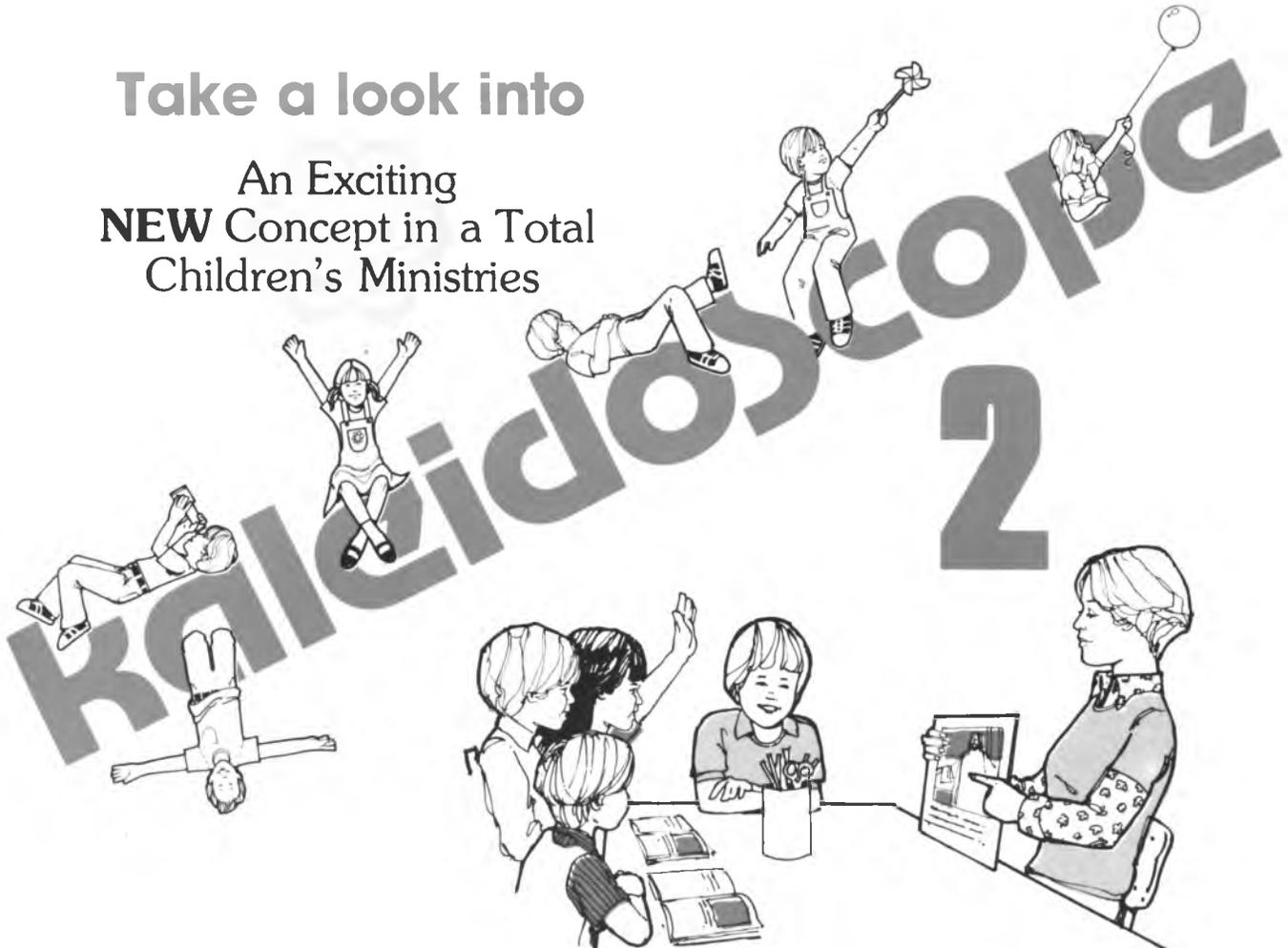


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"We are holiness people and the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is not a new thing with us. Now, when the attention of the Christian world is freshly focused on the relationship between spiritual gifts and church growth, we can be contemporary by simply being what we are . . . A powerful dynamic comes into the life of a church when spiritual gifts are studied. A fantastic resurgence of energy occurs when Christians discover their own essential usefulness to the Body of Christ." (Introduction and Chapter Six)

—**Dr. Raymond W. Hurn**
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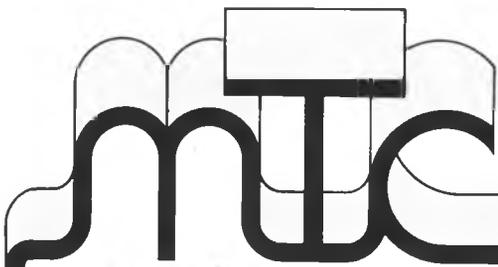
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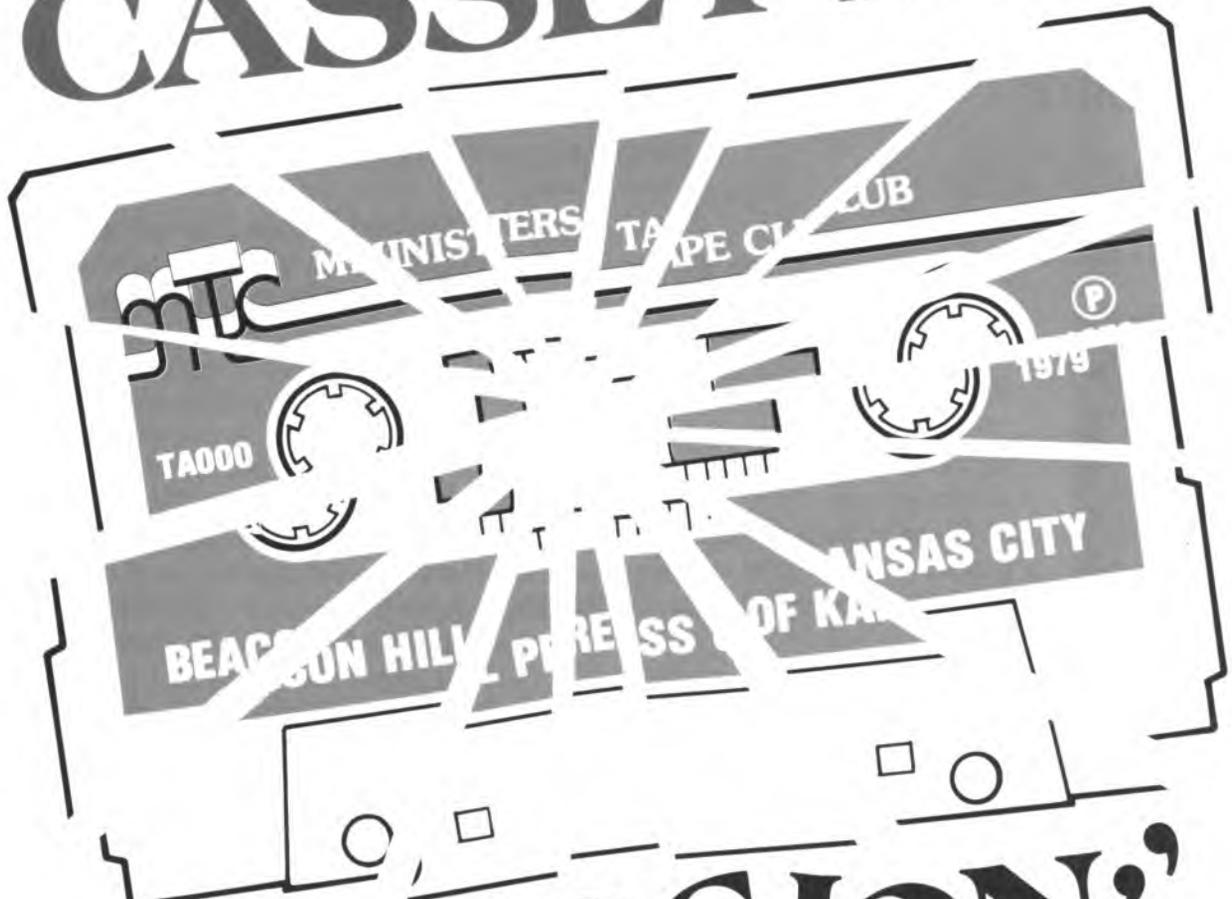
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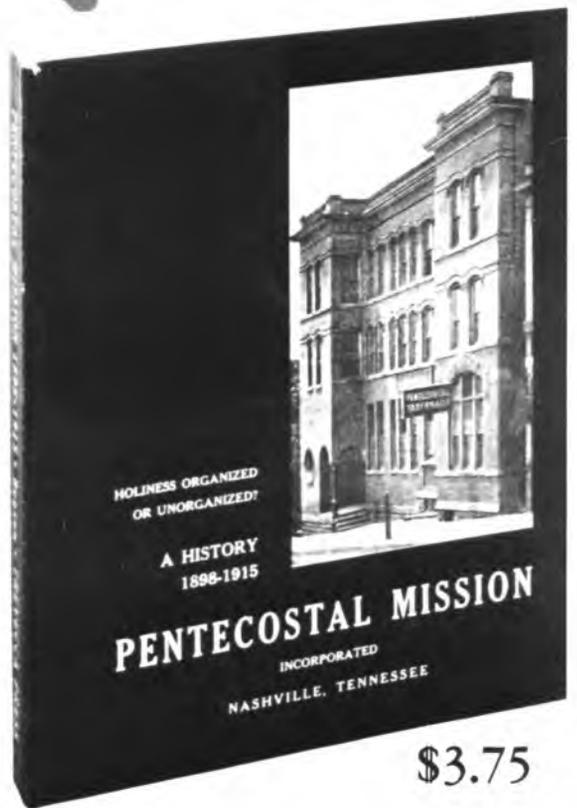
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TODAY'S BOOKS for TODAY'S PREACHER

Every book reviewed in this column may not agree at all points with evangelical holiness positions. Yet each book contains sufficient useful material to warrant bringing it to our readers' attention.

The New Shape of Ministry

by Robert G. Kemper (Abingdon, 1979. 142 pp., paperback, \$4.50)

The author says no one is actually taking responsibility for the "shape of ministry," but that pastors should seize the chance to determine their own destiny.

He contends that if pastors do not take charge of their profession, others will.

Kemper discusses the pastor's job description, standards of admission to the profession, the content of continuing education opportunities, pastoral placement, ministerial salaries, and the definition of success.

The style is provocative and unique.

The author calls a convocation of clergymen to which the reader is invited. He submits seven resolutions and asks the reader to help him determine if these are important and legitimate areas of concern.

Some of his statements will arouse your indignation, but a few of them will bring a chuckle. Example: "The problem of the lay constituency and its enormous power over the profession is not that it demands too much from the clergy. Quite the contrary, the problem is that laity expects too little because they know too little. If lay persons had all the skills necessary for effective church leadership there would be no need for clergy. The simple fact is that they are not skilled, and that is why the church has clergy."

And, "I genuinely believe that if clergy would ever own their profession, not only would there be more continuing education, but

also a new and very creative partnership between the profession and those who help it grow."

One more, "What definition we give, whatever polity we follow, the common truth about placement systems is that they are asked to do more than they can deliver."

This is an explosive little book. If its author's propositions are ever taken seriously—look out. It could start a revolution.

—W. T. Dougharty

Sermons for Celebrating

by Landrum P. Leavell (Broadman, 1978. 138 pp., paperback, \$2.75)

The book *Sermons for Celebrating* offers an exciting difference in special-day preparation. The author lives among his people, speaks the language of the workaday world, draws illustrations from daily experience, and very simply expressed, challenges every reader to do his best.

The worth of this book is not so much in its titles or subtitles, but in the kernels of truth abundantly sown through line after line in the field of the text. For example:

"We have not yet grasped the relationship between affluence and discontent."

"The menace of mediocrity threatens us continuously."

"When God wanted the world to know all we are capable of knowing about him, he didn't send a prophet,—He came himself." (Jn. 14:9)

Further enhancing the usefulness of this book to the minister is the wealth of practical, usable

illustrations. As one starts reading this work, the author's skill in illustrating his point catches one's attention immediately. I found myself making lots of marginal notes for future reference.

Pastors know that preaching special-day sermons is not always easy, especially when we desire a fresh new approach to the seasonal emphasis. I feel this book will greatly help in this effort.

—Oval L. Stone

Grace Unlimited

by Clark H. Pinnock (Bethany, 1975. 258 pp., paperback, \$4.95)

This is a first-rate book. It is a theological "sign" in much the way that Shank's *Life in the Son* was, only more so. *Grace Unlimited* reveals a vast crack in the monolithic face of Calvinism.

The authors include some of the most respected names in evangelical scholarship: Clark Pinnock, I. H. Marshall, David Clines, Vernon Grounds.

The general movement of the book is the abandonment of classic Calvinist positions that have venerated for centuries. There are chapters on Universal Salvation, Conditional Election, Predestination, Wesley, and Arminius.

The message is the same throughout: that Calvin was wrong and Wesley was right.

All of our ministers should read this example of the current trend, and a scholarly statement of positions we have always held.

—Alex Deasley

MAINTAINING CHOIR INTEREST THE YEAR ROUND

by Dale E. Kendall

Minister of Music, First Church of the Nazarene, Bradenton, Florida

The adult choir, whether in a small or large church, can be a burden or a blessing for those who have the vital task of leading this ministry every week. Keeping volunteers motivated to participate in your choir program can be a task that is tougher than you are. Too often, the choir work becomes a drudgery for its participants or a ninth priority on a scale of ten.

Keep in mind when working with a choir how you would like things to go if you were singing yourself. I am convinced that, with a great deal of planning, prayer, and preparation, the adult choir can be the most exciting part of your music program.

If we are going to get volunteer adults to really commit themselves the year round to the choir, then we have to make it worth their time and energy. Having fresh music on hand creates excitement. Would you want to eat the same kind of foods at mealtime every day? A varied diet is more enticing and such is the case with choirs. Be certain your music selections are within the choir's ability to learn.

In our church's music program the choir year officially begins in September. We begin with an entire month devoted to recruitment of new prospects under leadership from the choir officers. During recruitment month we make use of posters, the weekly newsletter, Sunday school class announcements, church bulletins, personal contacts, phone calls, and letters.

While we do invite people the year round into choir membership, one of the advantages of a saturation month for recruitment is that you can teach your congregation that you'll talk to them only once about joining the choir. They will come to understand this as a once-a-year promotion. You will avoid the embarrassment to yourself and friends because the constant "bugging" of people to join the choir will stop.

There is no one sure way to motivate volunteers to sing in a church choir. What works in one church does not necessarily work in another. Continually search for the best methods for your church.

A social activity every two months or so is a good tool to keep up morale. It doesn't have to be a gala event every time. Just remember to have some type of planned activity where choir members can interact. Perhaps preceding or following a rehearsal.

Why not have the choir take a trip to a neighboring church for a concert? Or, how about the

choir on television along with that ensemble or soloist?

Inviting an outside director to appear for a choral clinic can prove to be an exhilarating experience for choir members. This will help you implement things you have been trying to get across to your choir for months. If your guest director is a composer your choir members will really "turn on" to performing songs with the songwriter leading them. The lyrics take on a new perspective and provide mutual inspiration for the singer and listener.

Personal notes of appreciation are always well received when sent to choir people. It is good to let the choir know that they are important. Yes, even that choir member who can't carry a tune in two buckets, much less one. People respond to words of kindness and encouragement.

I use a special card which conveys appreciation, recruitment technique, or gentle pressure on absentees. These cards may be obtained by writing: Attendance Builders, 615 Water Street, Kerryville, TX 78028.

Choir members come in short, tall, fat, skinny sizes. They have quiet, loud, sometimes harsh personalities and voices. We must accept them as people, and love them as Christ himself loves us.

One of the most rewarding experiences in my five years of ministry was a choir retreat. Our choir people returned from a great spiritual weekend united and revitalized. The small investment of money it cost the choir members produced dividends for the church and fulfillment in the lives of everyone who attended the retreat.

At the end of this choir year, we plan to have a banquet just for choir members and their spouses. This says to choir people, "I'm really important." It tells them in a special way, "Thanks for an outstanding job."

There is never enough money in the music budget. Our choir people enjoy sponsoring a Pancake Breakfast annually to raise funds for the music department. Nearly everything is donated by local patrons. The choir decides with great difficulty how to allocate the proceeds. In addition to being a fund raiser, our choir views this happening as an outreach.

A choir has a spiritual pulse that must be monitored carefully. Promote spiritual deepening lest your message become void.

Methods, tools, and techniques all have to be used of the Lord to be effective. None of the above ideas are meant to substitute for what He alone bestows.

First in a Series On:

EVANGELISM IN THE EIGHTIES

by Hugh Gorman

Evangelist, Melfort, Saskatchewan, Canada

Can it happen in the 1980s? "Three thousand men permanently raised from death in sin to a life of holiness! Three thousand sinners converted into saints! Three thousand new-made saints enabled day by day to walk in the fear of God, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost! Three thousand of our brethren, weak, sinful by nature, open to the temptings of Satan even as we are, maintaining a life in the body which almost surpasses belief, so is it marked with goodness and purity."¹ Pentecost! Can it happen again?

What are the prospects for Pentecostal revival and holiness evangelism in the eighties? They're as bright as the promises of God!

Revival evangelism is not a luxury for the spiritually elite; nor is it an option. It's absolutely essential, for without it the church will be lifeless and unable to perform the task for which she was born.

We need revival to ensure that our churches will be centers of holiness evangelism. That is God's remedy for cold services, empty pews, and barren altars. It's the best way of letting the world know that God and His Church are alive and doing well. Our world is populated by people who need to know that through the ministry of the Church, God can heal the hurt in their hearts. Revival evangelism is part of that answer.

The Church can have exciting revival evangelism in the eighties! In the Word of God there are hundreds of promises referring to spiritual renewal. Not one of them has ever been cancelled. People are still holding on to them—claiming them—and experiencing revival.

What God did in Asbury and Saskatoon in the seventies, He can do anywhere in the eighties. His arm has not lost its ancient power, and He can lead us into the blessing of heartfelt revival.

The story is told of Dr. F. B. Meyer and Dr. G. Campbell Morgan asking the policeman in Cardiff, Wales, where the revival was. The policeman placing his hand over his heart, replied, "Gentlemen, it's in here!"

That's where revival is to be found—in the hearts of God's people. And if we're to see it in the hearts of others, we must make sure that it's in our hearts.

As preachers, we need to sing the chorus and make it our prayer:

"Lord, send a revival, and let it begin in me."

Whenever God graciously revives hearts, our desires will be to see many others revived. But no matter how much we'd like to, we cannot give revival to others. Only by sharing what we've found, and living a life in the power of the Spirit, can we make others thirsty for what God has given us. And God does fill thirsty hearts. His promise is, "For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring" (Isa. 44:3).

It happened in the life of Sam Brown, pastor of the Elk River Church of the Nazarene in West Virginia. God brought him to the place where he realized that his congregation was living beneath their privileges. Constrained by God, he prayed as he'd never prayed before. For 10 weeks he examined his own heart and read the Word, saturating his heart and mind with thoughts of holiness and revival. God touched his heart and gave him the assurance that they were going to have revival at Elk River.

And Pastor Sam Brown took the message of God and the burden of his heart to the church board. In that meeting God melted and revived the hearts of every board member, giving them a desire to see greater things. They yielded themselves to God and looked to Him for the blessing.

God didn't disappoint them. As Pastor Brown preached with a new anointing, the Holy Spirit came, and for 13 weeks there was continuous revival. In every service the altar was lined with seeking souls. The news spread and people came from afar, filling the church. Hundreds experienced revival. That's what God can do in the 1980s.

Here is the Word of God for us just now: "Drop down, ye heavens, and let the skies pour down righteousness: let the earth open, and let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together; I the Lord have created it" (Isa. 45:8). Revival is the will of God for His people in the eighties!

1. William Arthur, *Tongue of Fire*.

Preaching

the

Old Testament

*Rich rewards await preacher
and people when proper
preparation precedes preaching
from the Old Testament.*

by Charles Isbell

Professor of Old Testament, Nazarene Theological Seminary

The *how* of preaching the Old Testament involves seven steps. I have tried to outline each step, to explain its purpose in the sermon-building process, and to include some examples from Old Testament texts of the way in which each step may be taken. I have left untreated the question of whether or not a preacher should bother with the Old Testament at all, assuming that none of my readers seriously wishes to question the Creed of the Church which has always affirmed the Old Testament to be part and parcel of the Christian Bible.

Step One: Selecting a Passage

Two problems must be solved in the first step. First, you must determine the general section of the Old Testament from which you wish to preach. Four general sections of the Old Testament beckon to you. The Pentateuch or Torah, the Prophets, the Historical Books, and the Writings.

In studying the *Torah* remember that it was always believed to contain the basic revelation of God to early Israel through the patriarchs and Joseph, and then through Moses in the experience of Exodus. But it was also understood by later generations that the revelation of God to those early persons was relevant to and binding upon them as well.

The *Prophets* are the 15 books which bear the name of a famous prophet of Israel or Judah: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel,¹ and the 12 "minor" prophets. It must always be remembered that each message from these books has arisen out of a specific time and situation and that the message must have been appropriate primarily to that time and situation. If people of later eras recognized applications of the message for their own times, these must always be interpreted in light of the original setting and meaning.

What is commonly called the "*Historical Books*,"

comprise the third major section of the Bible. A better term for this section would be the *Deuteronomic History*. Many scholars prefer to emphasize the strong ties between Deuteronomy and the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings rather than to tie Deuteronomy totally to the first four books of the Torah. The subject matter of the Deuteronomic History interprets the facts of Israelite history from the era of Joshua² to the first few years of exile in Babylonia.³ And from early times, this Deuteronomic History was classified as part of the section of the Old Testament known as "Prophets." This means that ancient Israel believed the work of interpreting history theologically fell within the province of the prophet; and such an understanding should inform our view of prophecy as well.

The fourth major section from which you may seek a sermon unit is *The Writings*. Included here are all the books not previously named. In literary style, function, format, and purpose these books vary greatly and each one must be understood in its unique terms before you can grasp its message to the ancient people or to your own.

The second problem to be solved by step one is the selection of a specific passage which will form the basis for the sermon. Remember that chapter and verse divisions are not always reliable in determining proper divisions of thought and subject matter. Many modern translations divide into paragraphs, but often more than one paragraph should be included in a single unit of thought or a single scene. So you must learn to make your own divisions of the text on the basis of its content.

Here is an example. *The Jerusalem Bible* divides Exodus 3:1—4:17 into 10 paragraphs. However, all 10 of these paragraphs deal with a single scene involving Moses with God on Mount Sinai. So you must notice other features which will help you determine where the passage begins and ends. Chapter two of Exodus ends in Egypt. The people of Israel are complaining to God about their slavery. God is said to have heard and been responsive to their plight. But Moses is not in Egypt any longer, and it appears that God will need to use other means to save His people. Chapter three begins specifically by identifying Moses as the subject of the narrative, rather than the people who are in Egypt. He, Moses, is not in Egypt but in Midian. The dialogue which follows is between Moses and God, rather than people and God as chapter two had ended. So by means of a *geographical shift*, a *subject change*, and a *switch from talk about God, to talk by God in person-to-person terms with Moses*, the story has indicated movement from one scene to another.

Chapter three, verse one, is thus a starting point rather than a continuation of what has preceded. But 4:1 is different. "Moses answered . . ." indicates that chapter four is going to continue something begun earlier, i.e., in the preceding chapter. And all the other markers are the same too. Moses and God are the focus of attention. They are still in dialogue. They are still in Midian on a mountain.

Only in 4:18 does the narration introduce a change of scene. The story moves from the moun-

tain to the home of Jethro. The characters involved are Moses and Jethro (not God). Thus 4:17 is the end of the scene which begins at 3:1. Accordingly, Exodus 3:1—4:17 will constitute the basic passage from which you will attempt to preach.

You will soon learn to notice key words which are *introductory* as well as keys which are *concluding* in function. "After these things" will warn you to notice what comes "before." "Thus saith the Lord" will denote a direct quotation of God by a prophet which follows immediately. "Says the Lord your God" will be seen as the concluding statement of a prophetic oracle or an intermediate phrase denoting that a continuation of the speech follows.

Learn to pay strict attention to changes in the cast of characters, relocation of a setting, abrupt changes in style of speaking, and from general saying to specific application. These clues will enable you to begin and end your message where the biblical scene begins and ends.

Step Two: Establishing a Working Text

Suppose that you have decided to preach from Exodus 3:1—4:17. Having set the proper limits of your passage, the next job will be to decide which "version" you will study in your preparation of the message. By "version" I do not necessarily mean a *published* translation, but rather the text of the passage from which you will work in the study.

If you have some acquaintance with Hebrew, the fastest and most authentic way to determine a working version of your passage is to compare any good published translation with the Hebrew text. But even lacking knowledge of Hebrew, there are several things you can do. First, if three or four modern versions are in basic agreement, it is safe to conclude that there are no major textual problems to untangle.⁴

If the English versions differ, exercise extreme caution. Ask first whether the differences occur in the heart of the passage or are limited to differences of detail. Ask whether the differences may be resolved by understanding English synonyms. Perhaps the different words used are really the same in meaning. Ask what theological implications may be drawn from one translation as compared to another. And at this point turn to your critical commentaries for help in establishing a working version for yourself.

A "critical" commentary, addresses the original text rather than deriving devotional or homiletical thoughts from various passages. For example, the Keil and Delitzsch work is excellent for a discussion of the various alternatives possible from the Hebrew text, though it is otherwise rather outdated and predates recent archaeological and theological advances. The *Anchor Bible* is generally excellent on the text. Various volumes in *The Old Testament Library* are helpful with the text too, though sometimes they are too involved with literary questions to be of great value in theological exegesis.

By no means base a sermon upon a passage until you can assure yourself that you understand its plain meaning textually. If there are problems, dif-

ferences among versions, etc., which you cannot fairly solve in your study, do not presume to proclaim God's truth from such a text. Rather preach those passages which are clear after some study and seek professional guidance with the more difficult ones. There are enough clear passages to occupy you for a long time indeed. No single doctrine or spiritual truth is based upon a single text. So preach from texts which you can understand rather than those which are problem infested.

Step Three: Identifying the Kind of Material

When you are confident that you understand the text, you are ready for step three. Ask a simple question. What kind of literature is this passage? It should always be remembered that certain literary forms generally are employed by biblical writers for particular functions.

Exodus 3:1—4:17, the unit just delimited, contains what will be recognized as the "call" of Moses into the service of Yahweh. Several features are evident within the body of the passage:⁵

Appearance of God (3:1-3).

Voice of God (3:4-9).

Commission to a Specific Task (3:10).

Objections by the Human Agent
(3:11, 13; 4:1, 10, 13).

Divine Reassurance (3:12a).⁶

Miraculous Sign (3:12).

Once these features have been noted, the general outline for the sermon will be in hand. But beyond that, once the call of Moses has been analyzed, the call of numerous other Old Testament figures will be seen to conform to a pattern which would appear to be aware of, if not dependent upon, the form given to the Moses call narrative. Therefore, when preaching about Gideon (Judg. 6:11b-17), Samuel (1 Sam. 3:1—4:1a),⁷ Isaiah (Isa. 6:1-12), Jeremiah (Jer. 1:4, 10), and Ezekiel (1—3), one may profitably compare the "call" experiences of one man with several others. Both similarities and differences will appear, no one of which should be overlooked as incidental or insignificant theologically.

In addition to the "call" passages, look for salvation and/or doom oracles in the prophetic books; covenant lawsuits (i.e., Micah 6:1-8), and messenger speeches introduced by "thus saith the Lord." When studying the Psalms, you should know whether you are dealing with a lament or a song of praise, whether the psalm originally expressed the needs of a physically ill worshipper or spoke of the promises of Yahweh to a Davidic king. In short, wherever your passage may occur, its form must not be overlooked. Once you discover what type or form an individual unit represents (or perhaps several forms will be included in a single literary unit), you will be ready to take the next step.

Step Four: Determining the Function of the Passage

I have already indicated the close relationship between literary form and theological function. In this fourth step, one specific question must be an-

swered. What is the functional relationship between this particular unit and the rest of the larger unit in which it appears? Simply stated, we may ask the question this way about the unit Exodus 3:1—4:17. What is the functional relationship of the call and commission of Moses to the remaining chapters of the Book of Exodus? The answer will be significant for everything else you will need to do with the passage.

Chapters one and two of Exodus describe the continued efforts of the Pharaoh to deal with the people of Israel. Beginning with a plan of forced slavery (1:8-14), he had eventually resorted to open genocide (1:15-22). Both of these plans failed chiefly because of a few God-fearing individuals who refused to give in to the cruel monarch (see 1:17 and 2:2b-3).

Eventually, because of the advantages which came to Moses as a member of the palace complex, it even appeared that God had placed a savior for His people in a strategic position to subvert the Pharaoh. But then Moses was forced to flee from Egypt with a murder rap hanging over his head. He seemingly wished to forget his past identification with the Hebrew people and presented himself in Midianite society as an "Egyptian" (Exodus 2:19), married, accepted a job, fathered a son, and took on all the earmarks of a man who was happy to settle down in peace far away from the struggles of a motley group of slaves across the river. God's man was now out of the palace, out of a position of influence, away from the struggle, and happy about it! The cries of distress which continue to ascend heavenward from the Hebrews still in Egypt (2:23) are now recounted as if to indicate the fact that all hope is lost. Indeed, all hope based upon Moses would appear to have been ill-founded.

This is the context into which the divine appearance in call and commission of Moses is placed in the narrative. Moses is still slated to be God's man for deliverance. His unsavory past, his newly gained security, and his geographical separation from the struggle mean little to the God who inhabits eternity. On a mountain in Sinai God locates, addresses, and enlists Moses. The struggle is now to be rejoined, and thus Exodus 3:1—4:17 itself prepares the way for what will follow in the battle with Egypt and the Pharaoh.

The function of Exodus 3:1—4:17 must accordingly be viewed not alone in terms of what it means in and of itself but also in terms of where it is placed in the total narrative, why it is so placed, and what is its relationship to what precedes and follows it. Not all of this information will be preached in a message based upon a single unit, but the preacher must know it in order to preach properly.

Step Five: Making a Theological Affirmation

Now you know the language of your text, the kind of material it presents, and the function of your unit in the biblical book. At this point you must ask what you have the authority to proclaim as divine truth on the basis of your passage. Do not jump to the issue of contemporary relevance yet,

but strive to determine *the theology* of your text in biblical terms. That is, what does Exodus 3:1—4:17 teach theologically about God, social affairs (slavery), human need and suffering, and human reluctance to accept a divine call to radical service?

Clearly this passage aims at presenting God not only sovereign but also as becoming involved with human suffering, and Israel's redemption. It also presents a God who allows a man to argue, be reluctant, and shrink from a divine commission. But that same God moves finally from dialogue to monologue in 4:17, shifting from simply answering the objections of Moses to commanding, "Take this staff into your hand; with this you will perform the signs" (JB)⁸

The preacher certainly should enter the pulpit confident that his passage has given him the authority to say something powerful about the God of Israel who is presented as both patient and demanding, both concerned and confident, both sovereign and willing to limit His activities to the obedience of one particular man in a given situation. This is the biblical theological affirmation which is possible from Exodus 3:1—4:17.

Step Four addresses the function of the call of Moses in the Book of Exodus as a whole. Step Five determines the specific truth of that call in its own right. Step Four relates the passage to its surroundings. Step Five highlights the passage as a unique piece of revelation on its own.

Step Six: Assessing the Canonical Function

Once the theology of the passage in and of itself has been determined, you should consider yet another possibility. Is this particular passage used elsewhere in the Bible? Where? For what reason? Does a later biblical author base his theology upon the passage? How? Does he draw lessons from it as an earlier example which may profit his contemporaries by the retelling and remembering? Does he expound it as a negative example? Does he take a minor point from the passage and expand it into a major argument to his audience of a later period? These kinds of questions must be raised and answered as precisely as possible. Assess the impact which the passage has exerted upon the biblical canon as a whole.

This step will often involve you in the New Testament appropriation of the Old Testament text. Some notes of caution are necessary. Make certain that you match major point with major point and minor with minor. For example, Hosea 11:1b includes the famous phrase, "Out of Egypt I called my son" (RSV).⁹ Even a cursory examination of the entire chapter would indicate that this particular statement is not the major issue which the prophet wishes to address. Rather, God's sovereign choice of Israel, which Hosea explains (11:1) as an act of love, is an act of covenant election of an entire nation from service to Pharaoh to service to Yahweh. This basic act forms the foundation of all subsequent God-Israel relationships. But Hosea's real concern in chapter 11 is to argue that the once sovereign God is sovereign still, free enough in His sovereignty in

fact to choose *not* to act in anger and punishment but rather to act in forgiveness and compassion (see 11:8-9). In Matthew 2:15 the writer has taken this phrase which was introductory for Hosea and made it into something major and quite specific in and of its own self. That is, Matthew realized at least two things: first, Hosea 11:1b referred to a 13th century act of Yahweh, and second, the verse is not central to the message of the chapter. Yet he uses Hosea's words to expound the meaning of the flight of the Christ child to Egypt attempting to escape Herod.

How could Matthew so deal with Hosea's words? For him, all Israel was represented in and by a single individual. Had this individual perished in Egypt in the first Christian century, 1,300 years after the event in Hosea's mind when he coined the phrase, God's activity of salvation would have been thwarted. Matthew uses one-half of a verse, giving no attention to its function within the larger unit in which it occurs, because he saw a specific instance in the life of Jesus which paralleled another specific happening in the life of the people of God.

Here is the point. If you wish to preach about Christ and Herod, start with Matthew and refer to Hosea only as background for your message. But do not believe that you have thus exhausted the meaning of Hosea 11. To preach Hosea 11 faithfully, you must declare the love and compassion of God for a totally unrepentant son and you must proclaim that the God of the Old Testament is willing to forgive in grace even those who do not deserve it and even those who give Him unlimited excuses for destroying them. This will enable you to tell your people too that what God did in Christ, 750 years after Hosea, was not uncharacteristic at all but was rather to have been expected if people had known anything about God and the way He had dealt with Israel for 2,000 years before Jesus came. In other words, since Matthew did not choose to expound the central theme of Hosea 11, his single citation of verse one does not constitute a Christian exposition of Hosea's gospel.

On the other hand, you could scarcely preach from Hab. 2:4 without moving beyond the prophet to Rom. 1:17. And few Christians indeed could even read Isaiah 52:13—53:12 without seeing the face and actions of Christ embossed upon the page. What must be emphasized in cases such as these is that both Hab. 2:4 and the servant songs from Isaiah deserve to be expounded in their own right. Perhaps this could be done as a first of two messages, one to deal with what the prophetic passage meant to its original audience, and a second to explain what that same passage came to mean for the New Testament Christians. But to explain the Old Testament *only* in terms of the New Testament is to imply that the Old Testament words had no right to be included in the Bible for hundreds of years, that the Old Testament achieved meaning for the first time through Jesus. The truth which sustained generations of believers before Christ is still truth now that Christ has come and still deserves a hearing in the Christian pulpit.

Step Seven: Applying an Ancient Text to a Modern Congregation

Unfortunately, this is where some preachers *begin*. However, one who has not progressed through the first six steps foolishly attempts to be relevant without being biblical first. The Bible does not need to be *made* relevant and applicable, it *is* relevant and needs only to be set free in the minds and hearts of the hearers. Still, once the preacher has a firm grasp of his text as described above, he dare not enter the pulpit assuming he is ready to preach because he knows what a text *meant*. Rather, he must attempt to explain to his people what it *means*.¹⁰

Let me return to Exodus 3:1—4:17 to illustrate. The text tells us that God cared, God heard, God became involved, God spoke, God disclosed himself and His redeeming ways, God chose a human helper, God listened. It further tells us that Moses argued, was frightened, and lacked some basic talents (“gifts”?) necessary for the business of saving and freeing enslaved people. But all of that is in the past tense. So the preacher must know how to translate into the present tense. His own view of the Scriptures will come to the fore here as he asks some pertinent questions. Does God still speak, does God still care? Would God still listen to all the arguments a person might make in attempt to avoid responding to a divine call into service? Does a person of today have the freedom to be afraid? Does he have the right to remind God of one’s lack of ability?

If the preacher believes that the biblical text is relevant to and authoritative for the modern situation, he has already discovered the message which can be proclaimed from Exodus 3:1—4:17. Don’t be surprised if God suddenly appears in the most unlikely place. Don’t think it strange if God talks to a man or a woman in understandable ways. Don’t hesitate to bring to God’s attention every evidence which indicates that no human being can adequately accomplish divine work in the world. And don’t be surprised if God, after listening patiently until all possible objections have been raised and answered, chooses to end the dialogue with a command. These applications arise directly from the

affirmations the preacher has made about the text. That is what makes them not only relevant but authoritative. That is what makes a sermon biblical. That is what makes the trouble of the first six steps a worthwhile investment.

The seven steps are all interdependent. A golfer must have a correct grip, a proper stance, and a good backswing all at the same time. If he does only one thing properly, everything else will suffer. But once he has mastered grip, stance, and swing separately, there must come the time when he puts them all together in a unified and productive stroke. Just so, each of the seven steps is important. But before long, you will find yourself working on more than one step at a time.

I believe, however, step seven must always come last. And it must always rest securely upon all six previous steps. But steps one through six, done properly, will make step seven far easier than most preachers realize. The relevance of a text and its application to a modern situation will frequently explode upon your consciousness even as you labor through the seemingly irrelevant and difficult preparatory steps. And when this happens as a natural outgrowth of your study, you will know with great assurance that what you have to say is authoritative, and it will produce results. And your people will know that they listen not to you alone but to God.

NOTES

1. But NOT Daniel!
2. Or Moses in his later years.
3. Roughly 1200-500 B.C.
4. Without a doubt, the single best translation of the Old Testament available now is the Jerusalem Bible. You should also own the RSV, the NASB, and the NEB. *The Living Bible* is of no value for determining the text itself, apart from the question of its value for reading by teenagers or those who are beginners at Bible study.
5. See Norman Habel, ZAW 77 (1965) 297-323, on “The Significance of the Call Narratives.”
6. And note that each “objection” by Moses is answered directly by God.
7. Note the division of the unit!
8. From the *Jerusalem Bible*, © 1966 by Darton, Longman and Todd, Ltd., and Doubleday and Co., Inc. Used by permission. Note that this Jerusalem Bible translation of “take” as an imperative emphasizes the shift on God’s part from the role of dialogic partner to monologic commander.
9. From the *Revised Standard Version of the Bible*, copyrighted 1946, 1952, © 1971, 1973. Used by permission.
10. See the excellent article by Krister Stendahl, “Biblical Theology, Contemporary,” in *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 1, pp. 418-32, where this distinction is discussed.

NO FARM BOY

A minister prayed hard for rain. The ensuing downpour ruined the crops. “That’s what happens,” growled an old-timer, “when you get a preacher who ain’t familiar with agriculture!”

—John T. Hargrove

RADIO: TOOL OR TOY

by Randolph W. Sly

Associate pastor of Central Wesleyan Church, Holland, Michigan.

Radio is here to stay. But the days when the whole family gathered around the radio are gone. Disc jockeys and news have replaced the Green Hornet, Amos and Andy, and Ma Perkins; but we still spend much of our waking hours with this old friend in spite of the influence of its younger brother, TV.

We rise in the morning to our favorite DJ, dress while catching up on newsworthy events, and drive to work in the company of the local traffic copter reporter. At home, the entertainment center transports us to "stereo island." Conversation during dinner pulses to the rhythm of background music from our "FM companion."

Why hasn't the church taken advantage of this effective medium? Most of us think we have, but we have much to learn about the powerful vehicle called radio.

The problem we face today in Christian radio broadcasting involves placing programs on the right station at the right time. Let's look at this issue in light of the various radio outlets available to the church.

The Gospel: On the Air, Everywhere

Most large cities and many small communities now boast of at least one radio station whose programs center around the gospel of Jesus Christ. Many turn to this station daily for music and words of inspiration.

Some of the programs aired help people, yet the greatest re-

sources of the Christian station remain virtually untapped. The daily fare on these stations consists mainly of ministers from various doctrinal backgrounds preaching salvation to an audience that has already responded to the gospel. Perhaps Christian commitment can be reinforced by such programs, but to a large degree nurture and Christian growth are ignored. The church of today needs constant challenge to use radio creatively in meeting this need.

Any Sunday Morning

Radio brings worship services into the living rooms of those unable to attend church. Great hymns and the preaching of the Word of God fill the airwaves. But what of the non-Christian, the one at home Sunday mornings? He methodically turns the dial, finally switching the unit off in frustration. He wants no part of what he hears on a typical program.

How can we reach these people? Should we push for more "secularized" programming? Should we continue with the current diet of church services and preaching? We have a marvelous opportunity for a creative strategy in evangelism by reaching people at this key time of the week. Some broadcasters are seeking to minister with new forms: music programs with carefully prepared Christian content, and interviews highlighting the Christian witness of a prominent person. Stations actually welcome new and interesting Christian programs.

AM . . . FM . . . All Around the Town

Any day of the week, a twist of the dial brings some type of "religious program." Secular stations usually interrupt their regular flow of music, news, sports, and weather for the "Christian show." Let's be honest and realize a significant segment of the listening audience will turn off the program, either by a switch on the radio or in the mind.

People select a station because of a certain style of programming. They react against abrupt changes. On a freeway we have to reach the proper speed before we enter the mainstream of traffic. The Christian broadcaster, similarly, must be careful to fit his program to the format (type, style, and presentation of programs) of the particular station. When he prepares properly, the broadcaster can successfully enter the flow of programming and begin his travels into truth, knowing he has many passengers.

Here's Our Chance

The radio ministries of today range from priceless to pathetic in their ability to communicate. The content and presentation of each broadcast represent two chief areas of concern.

We must look seriously at these areas, keeping in mind the urgency of our message and the responsibility of using broadcast time. Five guidelines exist for using radio effectively:

First, make sure God is leading you to a media ministry. The dy-

namics of broadcasting enhance self-reliance and ego-centered behavior. This kind of motivation, which sparks many secular broadcast careers, spells the downfall of any radio ministry.

Second, target in on those you want to reach. Unchurched? Shut-ins? The Christian community? Teens? Young Adults? Senior Citizens? Find your audience and keep them ever as your focus.

Third, locate a station that fits your intended audience. If you are aiming at the church community, set your sights on a local Christian station. If you want to talk to teens, seek a rock station. The "FM Companion" plays mostly background music and reaches many adults, young and old.

After you have selected the station, acquire a time slot to reach your audience. For example, if you are especially interested in speaking to housewives, don't ac-

cept a time late at night or early morning (before 6:30 a.m.). Such time segments cost less but a program purchased for the wrong air time results in bad stewardship. If you cannot get the time (hour, day, week, etc.) you want, *don't start . . . wait for the right opening.*

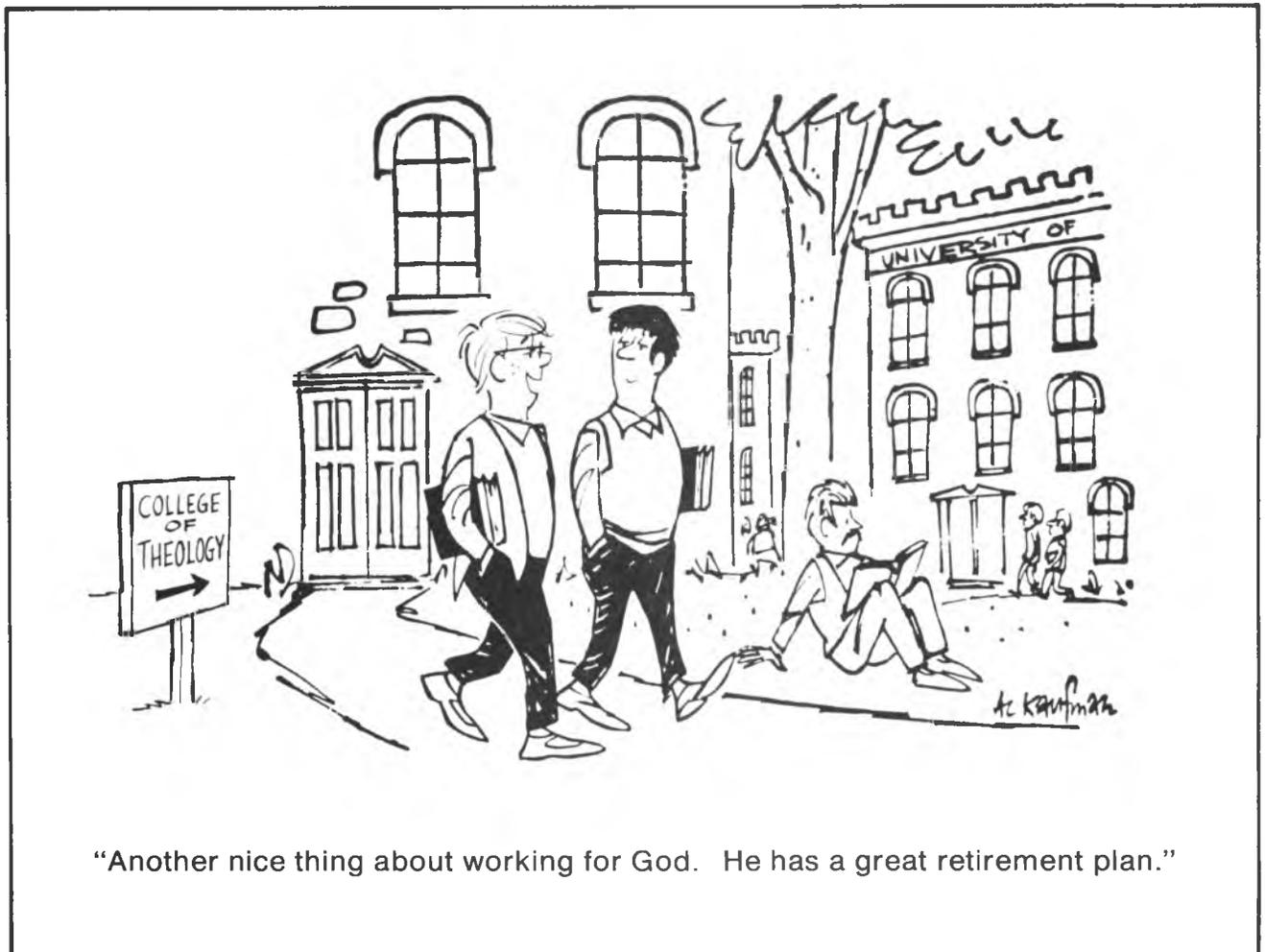
Fourth, don't hesitate to innovate. Let's say you're focusing on a teen audience. You're listening to a local rock station, and determine that a 15-minute preaching program feels out of place. The station's program director would agree with you. Begin to think of the alternatives, such as 60-second thought messages, five-minute programs to follow the news, or a music program.

Listening to the community Christian station will probably reveal there are too many "preachers." So look for something else: music, call-ins, book reviews. The opportunities are endless. Desperately hungry Christians yearn

to hear anything significant concerning their distinct life-style.

Fifth, don't compromise your message. Integrity remains very important. Of course, we do not have license to say anything and everything; nor would that kind of freedom be appropriate. Broadcast laws must be obeyed. But when it comes to the timeless truths of the gospel, we can't compromise to please the few who complain, whether station representatives or listeners. Radio constitutes an important form of communication; but the Christian can never sacrifice his message.

Communicating Christ's message to today's world remains both exciting and crucial. We must look critically at the quality and content of programming we produce. Radio makes a vicious master, a poor slave, but a marvelous tool when used responsibly and maturely for the kingdom of God.



"Another nice thing about working for God. He has a great retirement plan."

COME BEFORE WINTER

by Clarence Macartney

“Do thy diligence to come shortly unto me. . . . Do thy diligence to come before winter” (2 Tim. 4:9, 21).

Napoleon Bonaparte and the apostle Paul are the most renowned prisoners of history. One was in prison because the peace of the world demanded it; the other because he sought to give to men that peace which the world cannot take away. One had the recollection of cities and homes which he had wasted and devastated; the other had the recollection of homes and cities and nations which had been blessed by his presence and cheered by his message. One had shed rivers of blood upon which to float his ambitions. The only blood the other had shed was that which had flowed from his own wounds for Christ's sake. One could trace his path to glory by ghastly trails of the dead which stretched from the Pyrenees to Moscow and from the Pyramids to Mount Tabor. The other could trace his path to prison, death, and immortal glory by the hearts that he had loved and the souls that he had gathered into the kingdom of God.

Napoleon once said, “I love nobody, not even my own brothers.” It is not strange, therefore, that at the end of his life, on his rock prison in the South Atlantic, he said, “I wonder if there is anyone in the world who really loves me.” But Paul loved all men. His heart was the heart of the world, and from his lonely prison at Rome he sent out messages which glow with love unquenchable and throb with fadeless hope.

When a man enters the straits of life, he is fortunate if he has a few friends upon whom he can count to the uttermost. Paul had three such friends. The first of these three, whose name needs no mention, was that One who would be Friend of every man, the Friend who laid down His life for us all. The second was that man whose face is almost the first, and almost the last, we see in life—the physician. This friend Paul handed down to immortality with that imperishable encomium, “Luke, the beloved physician,” and again, “Only Luke is with me.”

The third of these friends was the Lycaonian Timothy, half Hebrew and half Greek, whom Paul

affectionately called “my son in the faith.” When Paul had been stoned by the mob at Lystra in the highlands of Asia Minor and was dragged out of the city gates and left for dead, perhaps it was Timothy who, when the night had come down, and the passions of the mob had subsided, went out of the city gates to search amid stones and rubbish until he found the wounded, bleeding body of Paul and, putting his arm about the apostle's neck, wiped the bloodstains from his face, poured the cordial down his lips and then took him home to the house of his godly grandmother Lois and his pious mother Eunice. If you form a friendship in a shipwreck, you never forget the friend. The hammer of adversity welds human hearts into an indissoluble amalgamation. Paul and Timothy each had in the other a friend who was born for adversity.

Paul's last letter is to this dearest of his friends, Timothy, whom he has left in charge of the church at far-off Ephesus. He tells Timothy that he wants him to come and be with him at Rome. He is to stop at Troas on the way and pick up his books, for Paul is a scholar even to the end. Make friends with good books. They will never leave you nor forsake you. He is to bring the cloak, too, which Paul had left at the house of Carpus in Troas. What a robe the church would weave for Paul today if it had that opportunity! But this is the only robe that Paul possesses. It has been wet with the brine of the Mediterranean, white with the snows of Galatia, yellow with the dust of the Egnatian Way, and crimson with the blood of his wounds for the sake of Christ. It is getting cold at Rome, for the summer is waning, and Paul wants his robe to keep him warm. But most of all Paul wants Timothy to bring himself. “Do thy diligence to come shortly unto me,” he writes; and then, just before the close of the letter, he says, “Do thy diligence to come before winter.”

Why “before winter”? Because when winter set in the season for navigation closed in the Mediterranean and it was dangerous for ships to venture out to sea. How dangerous it was, the story of Paul's last shipwreck tells us. If Timothy waits until winter, he will have to wait until spring; and Paul has a premonition that he will not last out the winter, for he says, “The time of my departure is at hand.” We

like to think that Timothy did not wait a single day after that letter from Paul reached him at Ephesus, but started at once to Troas, where he picked up the books and the old cloak in the house of Carpus, then sailed past Samothrace to Neapolis, and thence traveled by the Egnatian Way across the plains of Philippi and through Macedonia to the Adriatic, where he took ship to Brundisium, and then went up the Appian Way to Rome, where he found Paul in his prison, read to him from the Old Testament, wrote his last letters, walked with him to the place of execution near the Pyramid of Cestius, and saw him receive the crown of glory.

Before winter or never! There are some things which will never be done unless they are done "before winter." The winter will come and the winter will pass, and the flowers of the springtime will deck the breast of the earth, and the graves of some of our opportunities, perhaps the grave of our dearest friend. There are golden gates wide open on this autumn day, but next October they will be forever shut. There are tides of opportunity running now at the flood. Next October they will be at the ebb. There are voices speaking today which a year from today will be silent. Before winter or never!

I like all seasons. I like winter with its clear-cold nights and the stars like silver-headed nails driven into the vault of heaven. I like spring with its green growth, its flowing streams, its revirescent hope. I like summer with the litany of gentle winds in the tops of the trees, its long evenings and the songs of its birds. But best of all I like autumn. I like its mist and haze, its cool morning air, its field strewn with the blue aster and the goldenrod; the radiant livery of the forests—"yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red." But how quickly the autumn passes! It is the perfect parable of all that fades. Yesterday I saw the forests in all their splendor, and Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

But tomorrow the rain will fall, the winds will blow, and the trees will be stripped and barren. Therefore, every returning autumn brings home to me the sense of the preciousness of life's opportunities—their beauty, but also their brevity. It fills me with the desire to say not merely something about the way that leads to life eternal but, with the help of God, something which shall move men to take the way of life *now*, today. Taking our suggestion, then, from this message of Paul in the prison at Rome to Timothy in far-off Ephesus—"Come before winter"—let us listen to some of those voices which now are speaking so earnestly to us, and which a year from today may be forever silent.

I. The Voice Which Calls for Reformation

Your character can be amended and improved, but not at just any time. There are favorable seasons. In the town of my boyhood I delighted to watch on a winter's night the streams of molten metal writhing and twisting like lost spirits as they poured from the furnaces of the wire mill. Before the furnace doors stood men in leathern aprons, with iron tongs in their hands, ready to seize the

fiery coils and direct them to the molds. But if the iron was permitted to cool below a certain temperature, it refused the mold. There are times when life's metal is, as it were, molten, and can be worked into any design that is desired. But if it is permitted to cool, it tends toward a state of fixation, in which it is possible neither to do nor even to plan a good work. When the angel came down to trouble the pool at Jerusalem, then was the time for the sick to step in and be healed. There are moments when the pool of life is troubled by the angel of opportunity. Then a man, if he will, can go down and be made whole; but if he waits until the waters are still, it is too late.

A man who had been under the bondage of an evil habit relates how one night, sitting in his room in a hotel, he was assailed by his old enemy, his besetting sin, and was about to yield to it. He was reaching out his hand to ring the bell for a waiter, when suddenly, as if an angel stood before him, a voice seemed to say, "This is your hour. If you yield to this temptation now, it will destroy you. If you conquer it now, you are its master forever." He obeyed the angel's voice, refused the tempter, and came off victorious over his enemy.

That man was not unique in his experience, for to many a man there comes the hour when destiny knocks at his door and the angel waits to see whether he will obey him or reject him. These are precious and critical moments in the history of the soul. In your life there may be that which you know to be wrong and sinful. In his mercy God has awakened conscience, or has flooded your heart with a sudden wave of contrition and sorrow. This is the hour of opportunity, for now chains of evil habit can be broken, which, if not broken, will bind us forever. Now golden goals can be chosen and decisions made which shall affect our destiny forever.

We like to quote those fine lines from the pen of the late Senator John J. Ingalls:

*Master of human destinies am I!
Fame, love, and fortune on my footsteps wait.
Cities and fields I walk; I penetrate
Deserts and fields remote, and, passing by
Hovel and mart and palace, soon or late,
I knock unbidden once at every gate!
If sleeping, wake; if feasting, rise before
I turn away. It is the hour of fate,
And they who follow me reach every state
Mortals desire, and conquer every foe
Save death; but those who doubt or hesitate,
Condemned to failure, penury or woe,
Seek me in vain and uselessly implore—
I answer not, and I return no more.*

We all recognize the truth of this in the things of this world, but in a far more solemn way it is true of the opportunities of our spiritual life. You can build a bonfire anytime you please; but the fine fire of the Spirit, that is a different thing. God has His moment!

*We cannot kindle when we will
The fire that in the heart resides.
The Spirit bloweth and is still;
In mystery the soul abides.*

II. The Voice of Friendship and Affection

Suppose that Timothy, when he received that letter from Paul asking him to come before winter, had said to himself: "Yes, I shall start for Rome; but first of all I must clear up some matters here at Ephesus, and then go down to Miletus to ordain elders there, and thence over to Colossae to celebrate the Communion there." When he has attended to these matters, he starts for Troas, and there inquires when he can get a ship which will carry him across to Macedonia, and thence to Italy, or one that is sailing around Greece into the Mediterranean. He is told that the season for navigation is over and that no vessels will sail till springtime. "No ships for Italy until April!"

All through that anxious winter we can imagine Timothy reproaching himself that he did not go at



"I like his sermons. He always seems to hit the nail on the head where you're concerned."

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once when he received Paul's letter, and wondering how it fares with the apostle. When the first vessel sails in the springtime, Timothy is a passenger on it. I can see him landing at Neapolis, or Brundisium, and hurrying up to Rome. There he seeks out Paul's prison, only to be cursed and repulsed by the guard. Then he goes to the house of Claudia, or Pudens, or Narcissus, or Mary, or Ampliatus, and asks where he can find Paul. I can hear them say: "And are you Timothy? Don't you know that Paul was beheaded last December? Every time the jailer put the key in the door of his cell, Paul thought you were coming. His last message was for you, 'Give my love to Timothy, my beloved son in the faith, when he comes.'" How Timothy then must have wished that he had come before winter!

Before winter or never! "The poor always ye have with you; but me ye have not always," said Jesus. When the disciples complained that Mary's costly and beautiful gift of ointment might have been expended in behalf of the poor. "Me ye have not always." That is true of all the friends we love. We cannot name them now, but next winter we shall know their names. With them, as far as our ministry is concerned, it is before winter or never.

In the Old Abbey Kirk at Haddington one can read over the grave of Jane Welsh the first of many pathetic and regretful tributes paid by Thomas Carlyle to his neglected wife: "For 40 years she was a true and loving helpmate of her husband, and by act and word worthily forwarded him as none else could in all worthy he did or attempted. She died at London the 21st of April, 1866, suddenly snatched from him, and the light of his life as if gone out." It has been said that the saddest sentence in English literature is that sentence written by Carlyle in his diary, "Oh, that I had you yet for five minutes by my side, that I might tell you all." Hear, then, careless soul, who art dealing with loved ones as if thou wouldst have them always with thee, these solemn words of warning from Carlyle: "Cherish what is dearest while you have it near you, and wait not till it is far away. Blind and deaf that we are, O think, if thou yet love anybody living, wait not till death sweep down the paltry little dust clouds and dissonances of the moment, and all be made at last so mournfully clear and beautiful, when it is too late."

On one of the early occasions when I preached on this text in Philadelphia, there was present at the service a student in the Jefferson Medical College (Dr. Arnot Walker, New Galilee, Pennsylvania). When the service was over he went back to his room on Arch Street, where the text kept repeating itself in his mind, "Come before winter." "Perhaps," he thought to himself, "I had better write a letter to my mother." He sat down and wrote a letter such as a mother delights to receive from her son. He took the letter down the street, dropped it in a mailbox, and returned to his room. The next day in the midst of his studies a telegram was placed in his hand. Tearing it open, he read these words: "Come home at once. Your mother is dying." He took the train that night for Pittsburgh, and then another train to the

town near the farm and, hurrying up the stairs, found his mother still living, with a smile of recognition and satisfaction on her face—the smile which, if a man has once seen, he can never forget.

Under her pillow was the letter he had written her after the Sunday night service, her viaticum and heartease as she went down into the River. The next time he met me in Philadelphia he said, "I am glad you preached that sermon, 'Come Before Winter.'" Not a few have been glad because this sermon was preached. Let us pray that the preaching of it tonight shall move others to do that which shall make their hearts glad in the years to come.

Twice coming to the sleeping disciples whom He had asked to watch with Him in the Garden of Gethsemane, Christ awakened them and said with sad surprise, "What, could ye not watch with me one hour?" When He came the third time and found them sleeping, He looked sadly down upon them and said, "Sleep on now, and take your rest." One of those three, James, was the first of the 12 apostles to die for Christ and seal his faith with his heart's blood. Another, John, was to suffer imprisonment for the sake of Christ on the isle that is called Patmos. And Peter was to be crucified for His sake. But never again could those three sleeping disciples ever watch with Jesus in His hour of agony. That opportunity was gone forever! You say, when you hear that a friend has gone, "Why, it cannot be possible! I saw him only yesterday on the corner of Smithfield and Sixth Avenue!" Yes, you saw him there yesterday, but you will never see him there again. You say you intended to do this thing, to speak this word of appreciation or amendment, or show this act of kindness; but now the vacant chair, the unlifted book, the empty place will speak to you with a reproach which your heart can hardly endure, "Sleep on now, and take your rest! Sleep! Sleep! Sleep forever!"

III. The Voice of Christ

More eager, more wistful, more tender than any other voice is the voice of Christ which now I hear calling men to come to Him, and to come before winter. I wish I had been there when Christ called His disciples, Andrew and Peter, and James and John, by the Sea of Galilee, or Matthew as he was sitting at the receipt of custom. There must have been a note not only of love and authority but of immediacy and urgency in His voice, for we read that they "left all and followed him."

The greatest subject which can engage the mind and attention of man is eternal life. Hence the Holy Spirit, when He invites men to come to Christ, never says, "Tomorrow," but always, "Today." If you can find me one place in the Bible where the Holy Spirit says, "Believe in Christ *tomorrow*," or "Repent and be saved *tomorrow*," I will come down out of the pulpit and stay out of it—for I would have no gospel to preach. But the Spirit always says, "Today," never, "Tomorrow." "Now is the accepted time." "Now is the day of salvation." "To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." "While it is called To day."

The reason for this urgency is twofold. First, the uncertainty of human life. A long time ago, David, in his last interview with Jonathan, said, "As thy soul liveth, there is but a step between me and death." That is true of every one of us. But a step! What shadows we are, and what shadows we pursue!

An old rabbi used to say to his people, "Repent the day before you die."

"But," they said to him, "Rabbi, we know not the day of our death."

"Then," he answered, "repent today." Come before winter!

The second reason why Christ, when he calls a man, always says, "Today," and never, "Tomorrow," is that tomorrow the disposition of a man's heart may have changed. There is a time to plant, and a time to reap. The heart, like the soil, has its favorable seasons. "Speak to my brother now! His heart is tender now!" a man once said to me concerning his brother, who was not a believer. Today a man may hear this sermon and be interested, impressed, almost persuaded, ready to take his stand for Christ and enter into eternal life. But he postpones his decision and says, "Not tonight, but tomorrow." A week hence, a month hence, a year hence, he may come back and hear the same call to repentance and to faith. But it has absolutely no effect upon him, for his heart is as cold as marble and the preacher might as well preach to a stone or scatter seed on the marble pavement below this pulpit. Oh, if the story of this one church could be told, if the stone should cry out of the wall and the beam out of the timber should answer, what a story they could tell of those who once were almost persuaded but who now are far from the kingdom of God. Christ said, "Today!" They answered, "Tomorrow!"

*Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,
.....
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death.*

Once again, then, I repeat these words of the apostle, "Come before winter"; and as I pronounce them, common sense, experience, conscience, Scripture, the Holy Spirit, the souls of just men made perfect, and the Lord Jesus Christ all repeat with me, "Come before winter!" Come before the haze of Indian summer has faded from the fields! Come before the November wind strips the leaves from the trees and sends them whirling over the fields! Come before the snow lies on the uplands and the meadow brook is turned to ice! Come before the heart is cold! Come before desire has failed! Come before life is over and your probation ended, and you stand before God to give an account of the use you have made of the opportunities which in His grace He has granted to you! Come before winter!

*Come to thy God in time,
Youth, manhood, old age past;
Come to thy God at last.*

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ALL
HUNG
UP
FOR
NEW
IDEAS?

DROP INTO THE

IDEA MART

AND BROWSE A WHILE

SPREADING THE "GOOD NEWS"

If you are interested in extending and improving the visibility and image of your church, you should not ignore the great potential offered by the local newspapers. Most of the items printed in the local media were sent to them by organizations, churches, or clubs. If you want to make use of the opportunity, the following simple steps are offered as a guide.

1. Survey your area and identify *all* the local papers that are distributed in the area served by your church. Make a media list with names of editors, reporters, addresses, and deadline dates.

2. Focus initially on three types of news releases:

(a) A monthly "pre" news release of all the events of the coming month (sent to newspapers on 20th of preceding month).

(b) A "pre" news release on an upcoming event (sent two or three weeks before the event).

(c) A "post" news release on an event just concluded (sent a few days after the event).

3. News releases should be concise and to the point. Answer the questions of who, what, where, when, and how—and sometimes why.

4. Include in the release copy the names of people by "according to the Rev. . . .," "Sam Jones, chairman," "stated committee member . . ."

5. On the top (above the body) of the release give your name, address, title, and phone number.

6. Write in the third person. Avoid any personal pronouns or any additional adjectives. Remember that while you are writing the release, the newspaper prints it as if the newspaper were writing the story.

7. Put all the key information in the first and second paragraphs.

8. Often mention church's name and include the address at least once in every release.

9. Mail to all papers at the same time. On a post-news release, write and mail within a few days of the event.

10. Good "black and white" glossy pictures are better than a thousand words. Include a good caption of two paragraphs to add explanation to the picture.

—William D. Smith

From *Monday Morning*, New York, N.Y. Used by permission.



On the first Sunday morning of each month I invite volunteers to join the monthly Prayer Covenant Circle. I hand one of my calling cards to each volunteer. They write their names and telephone numbers on it and return it to me. On the following Wednesday evening I present each member of the new group with a list of all members in the circle and a copy of this "Prayer Partner Pledge":

"1. I will pray daily for the pastor and for each other person in the prayer circle.

"2. I will deliberately consecrate my whole redeemed self to God.

"3. I will witness definitely to what God is doing for me and will live from day to day in openness to the Holy Spirit's guidance."

A verse of scripture is selected to be learned, shared, and lived out by the persons in the Prayer Covenant Circle. The group meets together from time to time during the month.

This has brought real revival to my own heart and new life to the whole church.

—Luther S. Watson,
Warren, Pennsylvania

CHRISTMAS EVE FAMILY COMMUNION

I have found Christmas Eve to be a wonderful time for ministering to fam-

ilies by serving them Communion. Beginning at 5 p.m. and scheduled at 10-minute intervals, I meet the families for prayer and serving of the elements. My family assists in the narthex by greeting incoming families and assisting with the small children. This blesses the parsonage family to share together in ministering to our families during this time.

I ask the family to gather around the altar where we have an opportunity to reflect on the crises and joyful spiritual happenings of the year. The Christmas story serves as an excellent prelude for the Communion. Relate Christ's birth to His death and the meaning of Communion by mentioning the Son becoming flesh through the Incarnation. Then move to the scriptural passage appropriate to the Communion. It may work well to allow the family some time to pray and reflect silently. They will want to meditate on the past year's spiritual growth and the meaning of Christmas. Following this, serve the elements to the entire family.

This is an excellent time for teaching the children the significance of Communion. This experience strengthens family ties and heals wounds between members of the family. Many families include the married children and grandchildren. Our congregation has been extremely responsive.

—Paul M. Berger
Nashville, Tennessee

NEWCOMERS' LETTER

I send a personal letter to each newcomer in the area. I obtain their names through referrals, Chamber of Commerce, public utilities, newspapers, or the Welcome Wagon service. The letter must be individually typed or handwritten; first-class postage also helps. A duplicated form letter makes a poor impression.

The goal of this letter is to inform new persons that our church is interested in them. After mailing the letter I follow up with a phone call or a visit.

—Richard Cornelius
Midland, Michigan

PAUL: A MODEL OF CHRISTIAN HOLINESS

First in a series of exegetical studies

by Morris A. Weigelt

Professor of New Testament, Nazarene Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE:

¹²*For our proud confidence is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world and especially toward you.*

¹³*For we write nothing else to you than what you read and understand, and I hope you will understand until the end;*

¹⁴*just as you also partially did understand us, that we are your reason to be proud as you also are ours, in the day of our Lord Jesus.*

¹⁵*And in this confidence I intended at first to come to you, that you might twice receive a blessing;*

¹⁶*that is, to pass your way into Macedonia, and again from Macedonia to come to you, and by you to be helped on my journey to Judea.*

¹⁷*Therefore, I was not vacillating when I intended to do this, was I? Or that which I purpose, do I purpose according to the flesh, that with me there should be yes, yes and no, no at the same time?*

¹⁸*But as God is faithful, our word to you is not yes and no.*

¹⁹*For the Son of God, Christ Jesus, who was preached among you by us—by me and Silvanus and Timothy—was not yes and no, but is yes in Him.*

²⁰*For as many as may be the promises of God, in Him they are yes; wherefore also by Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us.*

²¹*Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God,*

²²*who also sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge.*

²³*But I call God as witness to my soul, that to spare you I came no more to Corinth.*

²⁴*Not that we lord over your faith, but are workers with you for your joy; for in your faith you are standing firm.*

(2 Cor. 1:12-24 NASB)*

I. Basic Background Material:

Paul is writing to the church at Corinth in A.D. 56. Paul has been a missionary for nearly a decade already and a Christian for nearly a quarter of a century. His love for Christ has only deepened and matured as he faces the problems of this stormy church.

The birth of the church was difficult in itself. In 18 months during the second missionary journey, Paul had

guided the church into adolescence. Her devotion to Christ and to Paul was not yet mature. Between 1 and 2 Corinthians Paul had made a flying visit from Ephesus and was rebuffed (note 2 Corinthians 2:1, 12:14; 13:1). A group of spiritual parasites, whom Paul calls "super-apostles" have led the church to question Paul's apostleship.

Now Paul writes 2 Corinthians to defend the basic validity of the gospel against all accusations (and in the process defend himself), to bare his heart to the Corinthians, to complete the preparations for the offering for the Jews in Palestine, and to expose the recalcitrant minority. A brief outline of the book with more specificity in the early section follows:

1:1-2	Salutation
1:3-11	Thanksgiving for comfort in affliction
1:12—2:4	Paul's integrity of motive and conduct
2:5-11	The notorious offender at Corinth
2:12-13	Waiting for news from Titus at Corinth
2:14—7:4	The Great Digression: Eternal verities of gospel ministry
7:5-16	The arrival of Titus—great relief
8:1—9:15	The grace of Christian giving
10:1—13:10	Paul affirms apostolic authority over the minority
13:11-14	Final greetings

II. Immediate Context

The immediate context includes the theological affirmations of the total letter. In facing the pressures that were placed upon him, Paul emphasizes the great eternal truths. He notes the total adequacy of God's grace in every situation. He expresses an understanding of the nature of ministry as he defends his apostleship. He argues that the new covenant in Christ is superior to the old covenant because it is accompanied by the unhindered presence of God in Christ. He discusses the understanding of the place of suffering in the gospel. He expresses a beautiful understanding of the nature of reconciliation. The letter as a whole includes an excellent theology of confrontation in pressure-packed situations.

The immediate context also includes the material which immediately precedes the passages with which we will be dealing. In the opening section of the letter, Paul gives praise to God who is the Father of mercies and God of all comfort. The praise is due God because God always comforts us in the midst of our affliction in order that we may transmit that same comfort to others. For this reason,

an abundance of sufferings is the opportunity for God to give us greater grace.

In verses 8-11 of chapter 1, Paul describes the intensity of the affliction that he experienced in Asia for the purposes of the Kingdom. He does not tell us what the sufferings were but he argues that they were endured for Kingdom purposes. The impossibility of survival which was so apparent to him served as an opportunity to learn reliance upon God.

In the paragraph which follows, Paul discusses the "painful" or "severe" letter which he had written to them in order to solve the problem of the punishment by the majority of someone who had offended him. The beauty of Paul's redemptive concern appears in this passage.

The immediate context thus is a context reflecting the intensity of the confrontation between Paul and the church at Corinth. It reflects stress and misunderstanding and difficulty for the apostle Paul.

III. Flow of Thought

An examination of the thought processes of the apostle provides a pattern to guide specific exegesis.

A. *The Testimony of His Conscience (vv. 12-14)*

Paul begins these verses with a reference to the testimony of his conscience. The witness of his conscience is that he has conducted himself properly before the Corinthians. The conduct was completed, he argues, in holiness and godly sincerity.

This verse contains a variant reading. Some manuscripts read "holiness" where other manuscripts read "simplicity." Both words are Pauline words, but the context here favors "holiness." Paul's decisions are made in light of the moral purity which God gives. The word *sincerity* expresses an understanding of a decision which is made in the light of the sun, and by implication carries nothing hidden. Both the sincerity and the holiness are from God and stand in specific contrast to fleshly wisdom. Fleshly wisdom expresses an understanding of the wisdom which is bounded by the horizons of this world alone and express man's sinful revolt against God. Paul professes that his decisions have all been made by the holiness and sincerity which God gives, yes indeed, by God's grace and not by earthly wisdom. Paul's integrity is defensible because he lives by the holiness and sincerity of God which do not vary. He notes at the end of verse 12 that the Corinthians had had a better opportunity to test the validity of this statement than anyone else.

In verses 13 and 14 Paul argues that he has written to them in complete transparency. What he has said and what he has written are consistent with each other and he hopes that the Corinthians will understand totally as they have already understood him partially. The boast which he has been making is necessary, for the man in Christ lives in anticipation of the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. The constant anticipation of the imminent Second Coming places an urgency and emphasis upon the lifestyle of the Christian.

B. *Significance of the Travel Plans (vv. 15-17)*

The words *in this confidence* refer back to verses 13 and 14. Paul has just stated his confidence—his persuasion—that the Corinthians would understand fully as they have understood partially. In such a confidence he writes: "I had decided previously to come to you in order that you might have a double blessing." The double blessing is then defined in verse 16. He wished to come to them en route to Macedonia and then to return to Corinth from Macedonia and have the Corinthians send him on his journey to Judea. The double blessing is thus a double visit to the Corinthians. The expected answers (according to the Greek) to the questions in verse 17 are negative. The first question Paul asks them: "In light of what I have already said, can I be accused, or should I be accused of vacillating when I made plans

like this?" The expected answer is: "Of course not!" The second question is: "Do I make my plans like a worldly man according to the flesh?" Paul had already told them in verse 12 that he did not make his plans according to fleshly wisdom. He does not say "yes" and "no" at the same time. And so he asks them to validate his stance before them in light of the travel plans.

It is evident that the opponents at Corinth had implied that Paul's change in travel plans was evidence of his inconsistency and therefore of his inadequacy as an apostle.

C. *The Faithfulness of God*

In verses 18, 19, and 20 Paul contends that his consistency as an apostle is derivative from the faithfulness of God. Verse 18 begins with the word "faithful" in Greek. Faithful is God. The underlying theological implication is that the faithfulness of God determines the validity of the apostle's word. Paul declares that his word has not been a mixture of negatives and positives. The proclamation of Christ Jesus as the Son of God was an eternal affirmative, for Christ is indeed the demonstration of the utter reliability of a faithful God.

In the final phrase of verse 19, Paul declares that the promises of God have become and remain (a perfect tense) an eternal yes in Christ. Verse 20 declares that the great variety of the promises of God all find their validation in Christ. The reason that the "Amen" is spoken to the glory of God through Christ is because He demonstrates and certifies and validates and authenticates all of the promises of God. The word *Amen* comes from the same Hebrew word as the word for truth with emphasis on the firmness, reliability, authenticity, and immutability of God. The implication of verse 20 is that the word *Amen* is more than simply a liturgical ending to a praying, but is instead a profound affirmation of the essential reliability of the promises of God as they are demonstrated in Christ.

D. *The Guarantee of God*

Paul defends his consistency in yet another way in verses 21 and 22. There are four beautiful verbs in these two verses which express the power of God in the life of Paul.

The first verb is the verb *establishes*. The root meaning of this Greek verb reflects the obligations of a seller to defend the validity of a sale against all possible claims of a third party. It is in the present tense and speaks of the God who keeps on confirming and sustaining those who are His own.

The second verb is in the aorist tense and is variously translated as either *anointed* or *commissioned*. The root of the word is the same root as that found in the Greek word *Christus* which refers to the Messiah, the Anointed One. Paul says that we (note the inclusion of the word *us* in this verse, for he is no longer referring simply to himself but to all those who live within the promises of God) have been anointed by God. The metaphor is used in the Old Testament of the anointing of prophets, priests, and kings.

The third verb is the verb *sealed* (also in the aorist tense). God sealed us. The metaphor of sealing refers to the stamp of divine authenticity and security and purity.

The fourth phrase is: "God gave us the pledge, the down payment of the Spirit in our hearts." The pledge was the first installment or deposit given in advance as a security. It was a small fraction of the future endowment. The same metaphor is found in the frequent Pauline phrase, the firstfruits of the Spirit.

These four beautiful verbs combine in this passage to show the great underlying and undergirding stability provided by God. Paul combines these ideas to show the groundlessness of the mutterings of his opponents with reference to fickleness and instability. The rhetorical argument of this passage is: "How can someone in

whom the Spirit of God dwells be faithless and insincere?" The evident answer is: "No way."

E. Workers Together for Joy

In verse 23 Paul uses an oath to express the certainty that he felt that his decision was made to spare the people at Corinth. He explains this decision in verse 24. Paul is declaring that he does not wish to manipulate or dominate them in any way, but declares instead that they are "fellow workers together for joy." The Greek construction is seldom visible in English. The phrase "workers together" is a noun in the plural. "We are workers together." "Workers together" is followed by the genitive of joy. In technical Greek understanding this is an objective genitive. We are workers together whose object and purpose is your joy. Since the joy is the primary purpose of Paul's ministry, it is difficult to accuse him of being ambiguous or lying to the people about his change in travel plans.

The final phrase of verse 24 is: "For you stand firm in your faith." "Stand firm" is in the perfect tense and expresses a stance which began in the past and has existing results. Paul even treats his opponents optimistically!

IV. Theological Affirmation

The theological affirmations of this passage are readily visible. The undergirding theme is the complete and total reliability of God. God is indeed faithful. This faithfulness of God has been demonstrated and certified and authenticated in Jesus Christ who validates all God's many promises to us. And so we express our faith in that great reliability through our amens to the glory of God. The proof of these marvelous promises is guaranteed to us by the presence of His Spirit in our hearts. For it is God who has anointed and sealed and given us His Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee, and it is the presence of the Spirit which is the establishing stability in Christ.

In light of these beautiful theological affirmations, it is no wonder that Paul began the passage with the reference to a pure conscience, open and transparent because his decisions had been made in holiness and godly sincerity. Only in Christ may we truly become workers together for joy.

V. The Proclamation

A sermon on the faithfulness of God as the base for the life of the Christian could easily be created. Another sermon on the Christ as the demonstration of God's validity and reliability with emphasis on Jesus as the great "Amen" who validates these promises could well be preached. Another sermon idea could center on verses 21 and 22: The life-style of the Christian as he is established and anointed and sealed and has the Spirit in his heart as a guarantee. Yet another sermon might be proclaimed from verse 24, on the expression "workers together for joy."

The whole passage could easily be used in a proclamation of Paul as a model of Christian holiness in the midst of pressure. The **introduction** for such a sermon would include a reference to the intensity of the persecution which Paul is facing in this Corinthian situation and the temptation to respond to the accusations of inadequacy as an apostle with human reactions. Instead of such human reactions, Paul models for us the nature of Christian holiness in the midst of pressure.

The **first point** in the sermon would be verses 12-14, designating the testimony of his conscience. In this section contrast should be drawn between living by the grace of God instead of by worldly wisdom and making decisions by earthly wisdom in contrast to making decisions in the holiness and sincerity from God. The first section of the sermon could then end with reference to living transparently each day in the light of the imminence of the return of Christ in verse 14b.

The **second point** of the sermon would dwell upon the faithfulness of God which flows through His obedient people in the midst of pressure. Paul here has argued that God's faithfulness (which is a matter of nature and not decision) flows through His people. That faithfulness has been openly and unmistakably demonstrated in Christ who lives in us so that there are no double meanings in God's promises. But those promises have become and remain an everlasting yes, an inner affirmative, uncontaminated by negatives. The point of this section would be that the trustworthiness of God is our base of operations. That trustworthiness frees us from being defensive and uptight and insecure.

A **third point** would emphasize the guarantee of God's Spirit within us. Attention could well be drawn to each of these major verbs discussed in the flow of thought above. Use illustrations to express the meaning and purpose of living in Christ through God's dynamic, creative stability. The guarantee of His Spirit provides a stance in which we may face recrimination and misunderstanding and pressures of all kinds with transparency, sincerity and non-defensiveness. Paul is a beautiful model of living the life of Christian holiness in the midst of great pressure.

The **fourth point** would reflect the theme of "workers together for joy." Paul's purpose, declared with an oath, notes that there are no selfish motives in view. The absence of selfish motives frees us from the need to be defensive. The absence of selfish motives leaves us to sublimate our human reactions in the grand purposes of God and become wholesale supply centers for the distribution of God's grace. We are freed then to do whatever is necessary to free people from the prison house of mistrust and disharmony, that they may walk through the door into a life of joy.

Add your illustrations and tailor the message to meet the needs of your specific audience.

*From the *New American Standard Bible*, © The Lockman Foundation, 1960, 1962, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975. Used by permission.

PREACHER'S EXCHANGE

FOR SALE: Antique Books: Two volumes of *Sermons by Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, published by Lane and Scott, New York, 1852. Also *The Life of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, by Richard Watson, 1848; *Dwight L. Moody—His Life and Labors*, memorial volume by Rev. Henry Davenport Northrop, D.D., 1899; *Mother, Home, and Heaven*, by E. B. Treat, 1878-82. All in good condition. For information or to make offer write Rev. Albert L. Lepley, 1526 D, Oldtown Manor, Cumberland, MD 21502.

WANTED: *The Works of John Wesley*. Arlan Hoskins, 5433 Tomahawk, Fairfield, OH 45014.

WANTED: Bound Volume I of *Christianity Today* magazine. Will pay \$50.00. Clayton Schletewitz, 400 N. Sunset Ave., La Puente, CA 91744.

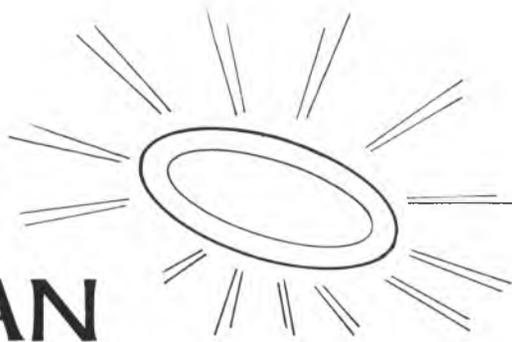
WANTED: *The Spirit of God*, by G. Campbell Morgan. Willard G. Steele, 27 Maple St., East Aurora, NY 14052.

THERE'S

AN

ANGEL

IN MY BACKYARD!



by Janice Fish

Pastor's wife, Ridgefield, Washington

The small inconveniences of a parsonage next door to the church had seemed to grow out of proportion during the Christmas season, too many drop-in visitors before and after services, too many activities with children wanting to check out our back door, or needing to use our bathroom because "the one at the church is busy." I was beginning to feel the pressures too keenly, and, to be honest, I was indulging in a little self-pity on this cold, rainy Tuesday night.

The teens in our church had chosen this night for their live nativity. They had advertised, and worked very hard to get the shelter of fir boughs ready. Some animals had been loaned . . . a little black-and-white calf (from a Catholic dairy family); some goats; a horse, who was soon exiled back to his barn because he couldn't leave the hay alone; and a Bassett hound named Ezekiel, who also was exiled, because he couldn't leave the goats alone.

Some of our faithful ladies had come to fix hot chocolate at the

church, and about 35 excited teens were taking turns dressing in the costumes, and taking their places in the live nativity scene. When I walked out to see how they looked, it was really so lovely. "O Little Town of Bethlehem" was being played on the public-address system. As I watched, several cars came, and parked, and the families came close to see and pet the animals. The little ones who came to see were so impressed, especially when they heard the sounds of sheep out in the darkness. In answer to their inquiring look, "Joseph" said, "Those are the sheep in the fields, where the shepherds are working. They were the first ones to hear about Jesus' birth, but most of them had to go back to work now."

It was very moving, and the teens decided to make this part of their ministry to the community each year. I was proud of them, as I sat in my warm robe and slippers, watching cars drive in and out. Then, it was over . . .

I went ahead with my laundry, which had been neglected too

long . . . again giving in to thoughts of self-pity . . . dreaming of a cabin on a hill beside the sea . . . with no phone, no doorbell, and no people to be seen in any direction.

What was that noise in the backyard? A glance out the kitchen window prompted me to take a closer look . . . there was an angel in my backyard!! His wings were a little uneven, his halo had completely disappeared, his jeans and sneakers were showing under his white gown, and . . . what in the world is he doing? He's putting a goat in the back of our station wagon!! I couldn't believe my eyes. I started to laugh. (And it sure felt good. It had been too long since I had *really* laughed.) With the laughing, all my thoughts of self-pity flew out the door. It was the beginning of Christmas for me.

Now, there are advantages and disadvantages to the parsonage next door to the church, but I wouldn't ever want to feel sorry for myself about it again . . . after all, the next time the doorbell rings, it might be an angel!

DON'T EAT THE DAISIES — PLANT THEM

by Neil Hightower

President of Canadian Nazarene College

There is a great opportunity of doing useful work, and there are many people against me (1 Cor. 16:9).*

The world would rather consume than conserve. Eating seems more exciting than planting. Many church leaders would rather fish than catch. A truly dyed-in-the-wool fisherman never asks his fellow fisherman, "Are you fishing?" but rather, "Are you catching anything?" In the church an inordinate amount of time is often spent on the mechanics, the approach, the delivery, but too little on catching and conserving.

We must ask ourselves a basic question. What is our philosophy of ministry? Is it to build an organization or an organism? You can build an organization on digits, statistics, and methods. But you can build an organism—a Body—only on the living, pulsating needs of people. St. Paul enunciated the Church's philosophy of ministry very clearly in Eph. 4:12-13:

"His gifts were made that Christians might be properly equipped for their service, that the whole body might be built up until the time comes when, in the unity of common faith and common knowledge of the Son of God, we arrive at real maturity—that measure of development which is meant by 'the fullness of Christ'."

Our service, the ministry of the

whole Body, is to build people into the mature image of Christ.

Church leaders are faced with the very practical question, "How do I get people to quit merely fishing and to begin catching?" or "How do I get people to move from a focus on yesterday to focus on tomorrow?"

Your immediate answer must be: "I, myself, will be willing to move from fishing to catching, from yesterday to tomorrow." Accomplishing that hurdle will be a major task; but let us assume you have done it. How do you motivate people to move instead of meditate?

Grasp your mission. The greatest motivating force in the world is a sense of mission. Every national leader, every army commander, and every Olympic coach knows the tremendous influence of a captivating sense of mission. Jesus knew this when He established the Great Commission.

Our mission is not merely to make decisions but to make disciples; not merely to persuade but also to equip. We must be clear on this. Program does not generate the mission, it must support the mission. Money is generated *by* a mission, not *for* it. Money and people-commitment doesn't flow to the organization with the greatest need, but to the one with the greatest mission.

Imagine an overpowering vision. The church needs imagina-

tion engineers, or "imagineering." These are church leaders who have found a quiet place before God . . . leaders who in prayer bring the throne room of God down to "the plain of Ono," to use the words of Nehemiah. We then begin to look at our place of assignment through the eyes of the Lord, and not through the eyes of Sanballat or Gashmu, the opposers of Nehemiah and the Jewish people of his day. We will have the same positive viewpoint of our text, "There is a great opportunity, and many adversaries."

Church leaders with a vision have decided that maintenance work—a survival mentality—is not good enough for God's work. They will begin to imagine great things; their dreams will be bigger than they are. They will, because of this vision, begin to plan for tomorrow instead of yesterday. Their plans will have flexibility, but they will be focused on making disciples. They will concentrate on raising a mission, through a vision. This will attract men and money.

Develop people-sensitivity. Church leaders with a vision of a mission will not let themselves be viewed as scenery or machinery, but as sensitive humans. They will not try to be "little tin gods," but warm, approachable people.

They will practice good people-flow principles:

- Bring people toward you.



“But I’m NOT a salesman! I’m your pastor!
I have been for 10 years!”

themselves under the Lordship of Christ. As St. Paul says in Rom. 12:3, “Don’t cherish exaggerated ideas of yourself or your importance, but try to have a sane estimate of your capabilities by the light of faith that God has given to you all.”

Raising the sense of self-worth among our people will raise consciousness of God’s inward ministry of cleansing and equipping by the Holy Spirit.

I have decided that I am building an organism, a portion of the Body of Christ, not an organization. Like Nehemiah, when requested by Sanballat to meet him in one of the villages of the plain of Ono, my reply is: “I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down.”

I am not building my kingdom, I am building God’s kingdom. I am laying hold of visions and dreams that are bigger than I am. I am thrilled at the opportunity more challenging.

St. Paul’s words in Rom. 12: 10-11 say it well: “Let us have real warm affection for one another as between brothers, and a willingness to let the other man have the credit. Let us not allow slackness to spoil our work and let us keep the fires of the spirit burning, as we do our work for God.”

May the blessed Holy Spirit, the Heavenly Motivator, rekindle our motivations to build bigger than we are; to build for tomorrow—not yesterday. May He help us afresh to become motivators in the church by:

- Grasping our mission
- Obtaining a vision
- Developing people-sensitivity
- Practicing good listening
- Concentrating on solutions
- Raising the sense of self-worth

Our opportunity is as big as our consecration.

*All quotations from the *New Testament in Modern English*, Revised Edition, © J. B. Phillips, 1958, 1960, 1972. By permission of the Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc.

- Win people by establishing personal relationships.
- Make the prospecting a foundation of bridging, but not the bridge.
- Affirm that the bridge is people-needs.

People-sensitivity, in essence, is walking in the other person’s shoes.

Practice good listening. Leaders are “pitchers,” to use a baseball concept. Good leaders realize that pitching is more effective if they know how to catch. This involves listening to persons.

Listen with your eyes as well as your ears. Listen to the nonverbal talk. Listen to the value systems underneath the language clothing.

Concentrate on solutions. The easiest thing for any group to do is list negative factors, or hin-

drances to any plan or goal. Leaders who want to motivate their followers will use their energy to water flowers (solutions) instead of weeds (problems). We must cease feeding problems, and concentrate on opportunities. As St. Paul says in Rom. 12: 21, “Take the offensive—overpower evil by good!”

Raise the self-respect of your people. Because of our misunderstanding of scriptural teaching about the crucifixion of carnality, we tend to produce a false estimate of ourselves. St. Paul’s great crucifixion test in Gal. 2:20 does not teach the crucifixion of the self, but that of the carnal taint of a believer’s ego. It teaches the release of the cleansed self, to be a person growing in the image of Christ.

We must help our people to establish a good, sane estimate of

THE WESLEYAN SYNDROME

by Clarence Bence *Professor, United Wesleyan College*

Although John Wesley clearly identified himself and the Methodist movement with Protestantism and its central doctrine of salvation by grace alone, he constantly attacked what he considered to be a basic flaw in the thought of both Luther and Calvin. These reformers, in speaking out against the works-righteousness of Roman Catholicism, had emphasized divine sovereignty and initiative in the redemption of humankind. But Wesley detected in their theological descendants a tendency toward spiritual laziness and moral laxity, symptoms of the age-old heresy of antinomianism. This "Reformed syndrome" was not so much an explicit teaching of either Luther or Calvin, but rather a distortion of a solid theological truth by those who misunderstood the scriptural doctrine of salvation.

Among Wesley's Moravian friends, this syndrome appeared as a "doctrine of stillness," advocating that, since God's predestinating decrees could not be manipulated by human action, sinners should wait quietly for salvation, making no attempt to draw nigh to God through prayer, attendance at services, or acts of repentance. Wesley's dismay at this passive attitude led to his parting company with the Moravians. He proclaimed the importance of using all possible means to prepare oneself for receiving the gift of salvation. While recognizing the primacy of God's prevenient grace in the work of redemption, he reminded his

followers that they must work out their own salvation, as well, by deeds of repentance and love.¹

The Calvinist expression of this syndrome centered in the doctrine of perseverance (eternal security). They concluded that if one was among the elect and was adopted into the family of God, no human action could jeopardize that status before God. Wesley correctly observed that this understanding destroyed one of the major incentives for the holy life and provided a rationale for a do-as-you-please approach to the Christian life. Using scriptural arguments, Wesley preached that human responsibility was essential not only in attaining, but also maintaining the gift of salvation.²

Luther's concept of *simul justis et peccator* (at the same time justified and yet a sinner) provided the theological foundation for this Reformed syndrome. By emphasizing that one's righteousness was only in Christ, and that all human efforts were meaningless and offensive to God, Luther opened a Pandora's box for those who would "sin bravely but believe more bravely." Wesley agreed with Luther that righteousness was imputed through Christ's atoning sacrifice, but also insisted that this righteousness was *imparted* to the believer, transforming the sinner into a new creation who must live out his or her righteousness or else lose the salvation attained by faith.³

Wesley resisted the Reformed syndrome of spiritual laxity by calling his followers to strive toward the goal; in fact, the whole of Wesley's theological understanding can be found in his constant use of the command to "go on . . ." In Wesleyan soteriology there is no place for slacking under the excuse that "God will take care of it." The Christian life is a way to the Kingdom and every pilgrim on the way must keep moving onward through the various stages in the order of salvation, from repentance to new birth, to entire sanctification, and even beyond in growth in perfection. Wesley warns those who would relax that "it is impossible that any should retain what they receive, without improving it,"⁴ without panting after holiness. Each must press on to the goal and the goal is nothing short of perfection, purity of heart, and life.

But there is an equally dangerous "Wesleyan syndrome" that grows out of this call to "go on." A distortion of Wesley leads to an oppressive religion devoid of joy and peace in Jesus Christ. For if one preaches perfectionism without maintaining the Protestant focus of salvation as a gift of God's grace through faith, the Wesleyan emphasis upon human responsibility and endeavor becomes exaggerated into an impossible demand. "Be ye perfect" is no longer a gracious invitation—it is a driving command, totally unattainable by any measure of *human* striving.

We can easily recognize the injustice of a father demanding adult behavior and intelligence from a six-year-old child. We can also conceive of the emotional and psychological damage such a requirement would produce in that child. But spiritual damage caused by preaching a perfection based more on human striving than divine enabling is equally devastating to the child of God!

This Wesleyan syndrome or distortion can lead first to a compulsive spirituality . . . a constant struggle to do better because of feelings of inadequacy rather than confidence in Christ . . . a continual fear of failure and divine disapproval rather than adventuresome abandon to the cause of Christ. Christians with this disease can only put themselves down, living out a spiritual inferiority complex, always demanding of themselves (if not others) a perfection of performance that cannot be achieved by human endeavor. Such a compulsive drive for perfection may become suicidal, for as many people destroy themselves by setting goals too high as by setting no goals at all.

Accompanying this compulsiveness is a tremendous sense of guilt, blaming oneself for every failure and shortcoming of the Christian life. We know all too well those Christians who are always "trying to be holy," but repeatedly return to the altar to confess the same sins, because they are

striving in their own strength to be perfect. Too often, the end results of this symptom are either despair (I'm not perfect and never will be!) or hypocrisy (I'm not perfect but I'll put on a good show!).

The final manifestation of this Wesleyan syndrome is spiritual insecurity. If salvation depends upon human endeavor, how is it ever possible to know if our efforts are good enough to merit God's approval? We are thrown back on a treadmill of works, trying desperately to earn divine "brownie points" but always haunted by the biblical truth that we can never do enough to merit our salvation *or sanctification*. Soon this cancerous insecurity spreads from the question of "Am I perfect?" to the more devastating question, "Am I even saved?"

What I have described is not Wesley's teaching, it is the distortion that so easily creeps into our holiness circles, producing a sick form of Christianity that needs the cure of the gospel. John Wesley discovered this cure himself at Aldersgate. Bishop Ensley describes Wesley in 1738 as a "victim of the spiritual fatigue which overtakes the perfectionists."⁵

For all his piety, there was little of spiritual merit in the Wesley of the Holy Club or in Wesley, the missionary to Georgia, for here was perfection by personal striving, not by the touch of God. Wesley needed to hear Luther in that Wednesday night prayer

meeting. He needed to be reminded that "faith is a daring confidence *in God's grace*." It was only then that he could trust in Christ alone (and not his own good performance) for salvation. With this solid foundation of justification by grace, he could then preach a *full* salvation attainable by that same grace—not human effort. "Going on" for Wesley was the opening of one's life to the power and activity of God—a progression from grace to grace—rather than a compulsive push to do better tomorrow by trying harder. The provisions of salvation must always be preached "by way of promise, always drawing, rather than driving."⁶

Out of Aldersgate came a new perspective for Wesley that placed human responsibility in proper subordination to the divine prerogative to save and sanctify. We would do well to join with Wesley in "adding to the constant use of all the means of grace, continual prayer for this very thing, a full reliance on the blood of Christ shed for me; a trust in Him as my Christ, as my sole justification, sanctification, and redemption."⁷

1. See his sermon, "On Working Out Our Own Salvation," *Works*, VI: 506.
2. See "Free Grace," *Works*, VII: 373.
3. See "The Lord Our Righteousness," *Works*, V: 234. Also "On the Wedding Garment," VII: 311.
4. *Works* III: 204; XII: 386.
5. Francis Ensley, *John Wesley: Evangelist* (Nashville: Methodist Evangelistic Materials, 1958), p. 15.
6. *Works*, VIII: 286.
7. *Works*, I: 102.

ARENA FOR TRUE FELLOWSHIP

(Continued from page 11)

7. Have a special emphasis on fellowship.

An outside resource person may have more "leverage" to help the people experience something new in a nonthreatening manner. The pastor and leaders can then follow up.

Developing the midweek service into an arena for fellowship requires knowing both from study and from experience what fellowship is and then a plan to navigate from "here" to "there" so that those who need the fellowship do not fall overboard because the ship went too fast for them.

*SUGGESTED READING

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- Edge, Findley. *The Greening of the Church*. Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1971.
- Reid, Clyde. *Groups Alive—Church Alive*. New York: Harper and Row, 1969.
- Richards, Lawrence. *69 Ways to Start a Study Group and Keep it Growing*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973.
- Snyder, Howard. *The Problem of Wineskins*. Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1975.
1. Quoted by Bruce Larson in *The Relational Revolution* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1976), p. 13.
 2. Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy and Geraldine Spark, *Invisible Loyalties* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), p. 8.
 3. G. Campbell Morgan, *The Birth of the Church* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1968), p. 162.
 4. *Ibid.*, p. 161.
 5. *Ibid.*, p. 162.

THE PASTORAL OFFICE

by P. F. Bresee (1838-1915)

Historical introduction by Carl Bangs, Professor of Historical Theology, St. Paul's Seminary, Kansas City, Missouri.

This essay on "The Pastoral Office" was delivered by Rev. P. F. Bresee at an 1881 statewide convention of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Iowa. Bresee, later to be perhaps the principal founder of the Church of the Nazarene, was one of some two dozen speakers at the three-day meeting of the four Annual Conferences of the state. The convention was a decennial event for "mutual and Godly counsel" and for coordination of the work of the conferences. The papers dealt with administration, program, current issues, and spiritual concerns.

Bresee had begun his ministry at age 18, in 1857, as assistant to the minister of the Marengo Circuit. He matured rapidly in spirit and effectiveness. At age 25 he was a presiding elder and at age 33 a delegate to General Conference. He had edited a conference paper and had held office in most of the conference boards and committees, being particularly interested in the work of colleges and seminaries. His chief love, however, was the pastorate. And at the time of the convention of 1881 he was the minister at Creston.

His paper on "The Pastoral Office" was unique among those presented at the convention. Many of the papers were reports on church statistics and administrative procedures. Some had to do with departments of the church—Sunday schools, women's missionary societies, and educational

institutions. Others dealt with public issues, which at that time were temperance, Sabbath observance, and the press.

Bresee's paper was preceded by an earnest but backward-looking appeal for the retention of the class meeting. His paper was followed by a second address by another minister on the pastoral office—an uninspired pep talk on how to be a denominational functionary.

Bresee operated on a loftier plane. The pastoral office, for him, centers in the twin ministries of evangelism and education. It is the pastor's particular task to seek the salvation of those who are in that "large borderland where the Church and the world meet and mingle." It is equally important to be a "teacher of the Word of Truth to the whole Church." The church is, indeed, a university, with the pastor for president.

The unity and power of pastoral evangelism and education stem from the pastor's own moral character as it is motivated by the spiritual power of the gospel. "A true conception of this work," he says, "can only be drawn from the work of the Son of God."

Some of the pathos of Bresee's own life can be seen between the lines. A pastor "may be obliged to do other things," and duty may put the pastor to "caring for afflicted loved ones, providing for the aged and in-

firm." Bresee was still in the midst of his involvement with Mexican mining stock, and he had taken on the care of his own aging parents. It was a situation that the underpaid Methodist clergy of the day could well understand. Bresee makes it plain that when a pastor takes on such outside interests they must be, like Paul's tent-making, "not for bread and butter, but that he may preach Jesus Christ."

Now, nearly 100 years later, Bresee's essay continues to speak with fresh challenge. The pastor is to be one who is thrilled with divine truth, aware of its unexplored depths, and sensible of its infinite glory, a large-souled person, embracing all classes of people—and especially the poor and despised, able to bear crushing burdens because of a clear sense of calling in union with Jesus Christ.

The papers of the convention were published in Burlington, Iowa, in **Proceedings of the Second Iowa Methodist State Convention, Held at Des Moines Iowa, May 31, June 1 and 2, 1881.** I came across this book while doing research on Bresee in preparation for the H. Orton Wiley Lectures in Theology at Point Loma College in 1977. I am indebted to the Library of the Iowa State Department of History and Archives for bringing the book to my attention and for making the text of Bresee's essay available for republication.

"IT IS NOT SO DIFFICULT TO KNOW WHAT TO PREACH AS TO BE IN CONDITION SO THAT THE HOLY GHOST CAN PREACH THROUGH US."

I suppose it is the design that I should say a few things in reference to the work to which we are called as Christian pastors, and the best conditions in which each pastor, in his own way, can do this work. The office is nothing only as it represents the work to be done, and each man, animated by the same spirit, must do this work somewhat in his own way. As Dr. Parker has intimated that it is not so difficult to know what to preach as to be in condition so that the Holy Ghost can preach through us—so in all our work the details of how it shall be done are not so important as to be in condition so that we may be an efficient agent through whom the Holy Spirit may work.

The work of the pastor embraces all departments of the work of the Christian ministry. While we sometimes speak of evangelists, and teachers, and pastors, still the work of the pastor embraces, in a large degree, all classes of work. He must do the work of an evangelist. He must teach all men who sit under his ministry. He must feed the flock of God with tenderest care, providing for the sheep and the lambs.

In this day when there is a large border-land where the Church and the world meet and mingle, where those who are not Christians, yet permeated largely with Christian thought and Christian principle, sit in our sanctuaries and abide in our homes, and when just outside of this circle there are large numbers almost under the shadow of our church who are devoid of all Christian life, there must enter into the pastor's work very much of the evangelist. Much of his ministry must have a more or less direct tendency to save these souls. The pastor must be always evangelistic. It would seem to be a poor ministry of the gospel of Jesus Christ that was not an evangel to unsaved men. It would seem a very barren ministry that gathered no souls to the crop. And no special evangelist can take the place or do this work for the pastor.

He must also be a consistent teacher. Every church is a school, and those which are fully organized and equipped may not inaptly be termed universities, with the pastor for president. But he is even more than this, for he must be a teacher of teachers as well as a consistent teacher of all. He must in many ways be adding skill to the hands which labor, imparting knowledge to many of those who are fellow workers, bringing out those who have the latent faculty for teaching, and training them for the work. He occupies the office of teacher of the Word of Truth to the whole Church.

He has been called to this office because he is a seer. Because whichever way he turns he has eyes to see. Because his gaze is further in the azure and deeper into the depths of truth, especially such truth as pertains to the redemption, salvation, and perfection of the souls of men, than those around him; and seeing, he brings it nigh and gives it voice, so that others hear and see, and rejoice in the same great truth. Men teach us science and art, because they see further than we, and are thus able to direct us.

So it is the mission of Christian pastors by steady

gaze and the teachings of the Divine Spirit, to see further along these lines of Christian truth, until bathed in its light, and rejoicing in its power, they tell it to others. And though this science is not in its empirical period, still it may not be learned by rote, and taught, as possibly some sciences may. Everywhere are there unexplored depths, and it is only as we gaze into these depths, and come with the sense of their infinite glory fresh upon us, that we can teach them efficiently to others.

The pastor is a perennial fountain of moral influence and power. Whether it goes forth from his public ministrations, or in gentler flow from the influences of his personal presence, wherever, and in whatever way he touches society, he imparts to it of his own moral spiritual life. It is this moral force that goes forth from the pastor that is more than anything else the measure of his power, and the criterion of his usefulness. He may have knowledge of the truth and gifts to proclaim it, and be apt to teach, yet if truth has not so permeated him with her rarest glory, so that he imparts a moral power, which makes his own unseen life draw men and impel them with its own power towards Christ and heaven, his ministry will be largely fruitless.

A gentleman who used to reside in this city, but has taken up his abode in the city of Jasper, a gentleman of the broadest culture and sweetest spirit, said to me one day that he did not attend upon the service of the sanctuary so much to be taught, as to be impelled. Most of us need to be taught; all of us need to be impelled. It is for this, as much as anything, that we need a human agent.

One who, heated and strengthened in his own moral life, imparts it to others. A man who, seeing truth is not thrilled by it, to whose cheek it brings no glow, and who imparts only the truth to others, is not fitted to be a Christian teacher. The truth working in him mightily, creates a moral force which makes his teaching a moral power.

In order to accomplish this work of evangelizing and teaching and imparting moral strength, there are some facts and essential conditions of manhood which may be won or developed, which it may be well to advert to.

A pastor must be a large-souled man. We sometimes speak of men as being whole-souled. This does not seem to be correct, for it seems to indicate that some men have only a fraction, and we almost feel justified from the smallness of the amount. But the correct way is to say large-souled. Some men seem to be nearly all soul, the body only the base of operations. They are full and surrounded, ensphered in an almost boundless soul. The pastor needs to be large enough to take to his heart all classes of men, whatever their relation to him; those who oppose him as well as themselves, and he stands especially near to the poor and the despised.

There must be in him such a fullness of the Christly spirit that it is impossible for him to become acrid or disaffected. He will have enemies to deal with as well as friends, and his heart must be large

enough to love them all. He will often be in surroundings not congenial, and possibly sometimes where he thinks he should not have been placed. He must be so filled with the Christly spirit, that with sweetness and humility he meets all the difficulties and trials of his work.

He must have a clear conviction that God has called him to this work. There should be no haste nor rashness in entering upon this office. In our Church there is none. We obey the apostolic injunction to "lay hands suddenly on no man." This conviction of the Divine call to this work should be so settled that it need never be reviewed. There are difficulties, trials and temptations in this work, which to overcome a man will need to feel God calls me to it. There are burdens to be borne of almost crushing weight, which are never to be laid down from one year's end to the other, and he needs to feel such a union with the Lord Jesus Christ in the work that he can lay both the burden and himself in His all-loving arms.

**This work . . . is far
above all worldly
. . . power or gains.**

There is often such a sense of humiliation in view of the utter inadequacy of our feeble efforts to meet the necessities of the times and the occasion, that we would often fain lay down the work for stronger and abler hands. I suppose my own experience is not dissimilar to others. I have often gone home on a Sabbath night feeling heartsick over my inability to preach the gospel as it ought to be preached, and feeling I could never look the congregation in the face again. A man needs, under circumstances like these, a clear sense of his call of God to the work.

Uncertainty is always an element of weakness, and never more so than in this most difficult work. There must be something of a comprehension of the greatness of the work to which we are called. Any man that has a low or inferior idea of the pastoral office, will not be likely to succeed in it. He who does not regard this as the highest work, that which of all others he loves the best; that which he would choose if all paths were open to him, has not the spirit of the true pastor. This work to him is far above all worldly places, or power, or gains. He may be obliged to do other things, but it is that he may do this.

Paul made tents, but it was not for the sake of the tents, but that he might preach the gospel; that was the great end, that was the one thing he had in

view, all others were subsidiary to that. So with the minister of Christ; he may be obliged to turn sometimes to the making of the tent and the other, that those God has given him in sacred trust suffer not; that he may not be classed among those who are worse than infidels. But it is not for the bread and butter, but that he may preach Jesus Christ.

This is not a work of convenience to be taken up and laid down as we may or may not have other work to do. It is no special sign that a man is called to the Christian pastorate because he has nothing to do, or has failed in other things. Men are called and sanctified to this work from their youth, and he who would lightly lay it down for worldly emoluments or place, has little conception of it. Duty, high and imperative, the same voice that called him to it, may bid him turn in part, or even wholly from it; caring for afflicted loved ones, providing for the aged and infirm, may compel him, but even then, it seems to me, it will be the sorrow of a true pastor's life.

A true conception of this work can only be drawn from the work of the Son of God. We must stand in the shadow of the Cross—we must see that Cross lifted through the centuries, until it stands erect on Calvary, and as we gaze upon that dying Christ, and see the glory of the love of God in that marred face—waiting here, the true pastor learns the value of men, and as Christ asks, "Whom shall I send?" he says, "Here am I, send me." And Jesus says: "As the Father hath sent me, so send I you." Receiving thus his commission from Jesus Christ, bedewed with His tears and bathed with His blood, it enters in and takes possession of his soul, and he feels that "'Tis all my business here below to cry, Behold the Lamb."

There is ever before the pastor a vivid sense of the need of those to whom he ministers. To me it is one of the most overwhelming views of the work of the Christian pastor to look into the faces of those to whom we minister, and think of their need. There is that aged man, seeking the ripening influences of the gospel; there is the desolate heart of that bereaved widow, who seeks through the ministry of the Word some strength to bear her burden of sorrow and care; there is the man of business, burdened and half heartsick, he waits to be led out under the fairer skies of unfading verities; the forsaken, forlorn, hopeless, as well as those full of hope, whose hope may be false; many that have sorrow and trouble you know not of; and little children. When the Word is preached, evidently some hear that will never hear again; some that are in the valley of decision. And the pastor's words, whether spoken in the pulpit or home circle, more than the words of any other, are to be cherished, and producing an abiding influence moulding destiny. This will doubtless bring a heavy sense of responsibility, but no man can be a pastor, either in the pulpit or out of it, who does not feel this responsibility, and who does not feel that "I must feed and strengthen all these, and reinforce them in their moral life." "Blessed is that servant whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing."

by C. Neil Strait

Sin and Darkness

E. Stanley Jones, in his book *The Way*, quotes Moffatt's translation of 1 John 2:10-11 which is "He who loves his brother remains in the light—and in the light there is no pitfall; but he who hates his brother is in darkness, he walks in darkness and does not know where he is going, for the darkness has blinded his eyes."

From these verses, Dr. Jones forwards four thoughts that give us an insight to sin. They serve as good possibilities for a sermon, or a series.

One, the general atmosphere of sin is darkness. "He who hates his brother is in darkness, he walks in darkness."

Two, the only possible progress is forward into darkness. "He walks in darkness."

Three, the darkness keeps a man from arriving, for he does not know where he is going. "He walks in darkness and does not know where he is going." Someone has said if you don't know where you're going, any road will get you there.

Four, blindness is the end result. "The darkness has blinded his eyes." It is blindness that keeps a life mired in the lesser things of life, blinded to the exciting ways of God, to truth, to love, to victory.

Spirit-filled Life

In an effort to approach the Spirit-filled life in a somewhat different way, I did a series from Easter to Pentecost, using the principles of business and management for the seven-Sunday series.

The seven stages I worked with were Objective, Goal, Planning, Organization, Implementation, Control, and Evaluation.

I had as the Objective for the seven-Sunday series the call of the holy life—"Be Ye Holy." I stressed, especially for the sake of new attenders and those new to the holiness message, that the call to the holy life was a "tall order" and that we were going to break it down into Sunday by Sunday steps, so we could logically and biblically move toward the holy life (the objective). Scriptures used were: Eph. 1:4; Rom. 12:1; Col. 1:22; 3:12; and 1 Pet. 1:15-16.

The Goal for the series was: "To move life, a day

at a time, toward God's plan." Or restating it another way, "To know Christ better." Ted Engstrom says of a goal that it "is a statement about what we hope to do or be tomorrow, or next week or next year." Scriptures used for this section were from *The Living Bible*—2 Cor. 10:13; Phil. 1:6; Col. 2:6-7; Titus 3:3-7; and 1 Pet. 1:2.

A Plan was the third item in the series. For the sinner, his first plan of putting the goal into operation would be repentance (Mark 1:15; 6:12; Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; and 3:19). Here I had opportunity to deal with sin, identify it, and give it biblical perspective. The plan for the born-again Christian would be to proceed—in growth—and consecrate his life to God, allowing the Spirit to sanctify.

The Organization process I covered with an outline of the word G-R-O-W-T-H—**God's Regenerating (new life/new light/new love) Opening Windows To (the) Heart**. This gave me opportunity to talk about the biblical mandate for obedience and commitment as I talked about (1) Bringing life under the authority of the Word; (2) Abiding in Christ, "Jesus Is Lord!"; (3) Committing life to the right; (4) Building obedience into life; (5) Trust.

Under the subject of Implementation I spoke about the effects of the consecrated/committed heart on all of life. Scriptures used were: 1 Sam. 16:7; Prov. 4:23; Ezek. 11:19-20; 18:31; 36:25-27; Matt. 12:34; Rom. 10:9-10; Eph. 6:6; Heb. 10:22. This section gave opportunity to talk about the effects of sanctification on the psychical (mind/emotions/choice side of life) and the body.

A section on Control gave occasion to talk about the disciplines of life—prayer, Bible study (in depth), worship, fellowship, witnessing—and the necessity for obedience. This section is a good area for talking about process and growth in the sanctified life.

A final wrap-up sermon dealt with Evaluation. What are the requirements for the sanctified life, biblically? What has been the follow-through? What should be the results? The fruits of the Spirit in daily living? This is a good opportunity to talk about the Christlike character of the holy life. And, hopefully, when this section is completed, the congregation will have walked from the objective ("Be Ye Holy") to the joys of the Spirit-filled life.



SERMON OUTLINES

ADVENT: SEASON OF SUBMISSION

Matt. 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38

Introduction: "Submission" is almost a dirty word in our time. Culturally we admire assertiveness and aggression and despise submissiveness.

Nevertheless, during Advent we begin to feel a mood of submissiveness. People change, even if only for a time. Ebenezer Scrooge himself finally submitted to a higher set of values.

Joseph and Mary demonstrate this attitude beautifully as they are drawn into preparation for Christmas.

I. SUBMITTING TO GOD

1. Mary offered submission at the cost of appearing to others as an unfaithful woman.
2. Joseph offered submission at the cost of appearing foolish.
3. How could they have done this as they did?

II. READINESS FOR SUBMITTING TO GOD

1. What we know about them and their culture would indicate that they had learned submission to parents, to established authority, to God in less costly issues.
2. When their opportunity for greater service came, they were ready through previous submission and faithfulness.

Conclusion: Advent rekindles in us the desire to learn more of the meaning of submission. Let this desire grow, and let it be satisfied under the direction of the Holy Spirit as you prepare for Christmas.

—Richard Young
Shawnee, Kansas

ADVENT: SEASON OF HOPE

Luke 2:21-35

Introduction: Advent is the season of preparation for Christmas. It can be a beautiful, meaningful experience for us this year with the help of some persons who experienced the wonder of Christ's birth.

One of the characteristic feelings of Advent is hopefulness. Simeon was one who lived by the hope that God would fulfill His promises. The coming of Christmas each year still stirs hope in human hearts.

With Simeon as our guide, we can understand better why Advent is a season of hope.

I. HOPE FOR SALVATION—v. 30

2. Simeon lived by the hope that he would see God's saving work in Christ.
2. Hope for deliverance and freedom is common to us all.
3. Christmas offers the fulfillment of that hope.

II. HOPE FOR REVELATION—v. 32

1. Simeon lived by the hope that God would disclose himself to all persons.
2. Hope for knowledge of the truth is common to us all.
3. Christmas offers the fulfillment of that hope.

III. HOPE FOR GLORY—v. 32

1. Simeon lived by the hope that Israel would be restored.
2. Hope for becoming what we were meant to be is common to us all.
3. Christmas offers the fulfillment of that hope.

Conclusion: Advent is a season of hope because Christmas means deliverance, knowledge of the truth, becoming what God has in mind for us to be. Let the hope of this beautiful season move you to believe and to receive all that God is offering you.

—Richard Young

For Christmas

JUST TOO BUSY!

SCRIPTURE: Luke 2:1-7

INTRODUCTION: The year: 1885. The Place: the Paris Art Salon. It is the first showing of Luc Olivier's small painting, "The Arrival at Bethlehem." It highlights Mary's weary and suffering face turned away from the door of the inn where the hostess is turning Joseph away with a haughty superior air.

One critic commented, "The setting is only a background for a very human story that concerns three people—helpless and desperate Mary, helpless and exasperated Joseph, and a hardhearted woman."

But, perceptive scholars see nothing of this in Luke's statement, "no room in the inn." As long as we attribute evil motives to the innkeeper the story does not touch us. But dis-

associate it from history's overlay and it speaks to our day.

It is evident that she, or he

I. LOST THE SACRED IN THE SHUFFLE

He was not bad—just busy

A. He was not bad . . .

—Luke does not even imply wrong conduct. This was a business. You rented to the first customers who arrived.

—He did what you and I would have done, what we have often done, what we have the right to do—be successful in business.

B. He was not bad, just busy

—Never are we in greater danger of getting too busy than in this sacred season. There is much that is religious in December, little that is deeply spiritual.

—Each year we vow that the season will have new meaning, and suddenly we are so exhausted we lose the sense of His presence.

You can say one more thing about the innkeeper, he lost the sacred in the shuffle because,

II. HE LEFT THE SACRED IN THE SANCTUARY

A. There is an Old Testament story that illustrates this truth.

—Jacob running for his life because he cheated his brother says, "Surely, the Lord is in this place and I knew it not" (Gen. 28:16).

B. It was true in the day of Christ. The most efficient churchmen in history insisted on Christ's execution.

C. It has a fairly modern ring to it also!

—"The man who has nothing before which he is eager to bow will someday be flattened by the sheer weight of himself." (Frederick Speakman)

—Gene Van Note
Kansas City, Missouri

THE CHRISTIAN OLYMPICS

TEXT: Heb. 12:1-2

INTRODUCTION: The Hebrew Christians to whom this Epistle was written were not finding the way of Christianity easy. Many of them had become discouraged under persecution. To encourage them the writer of this Epistle urges them to hold fast the profession of their faith, in so doing he points them to Christ, the One who



SERMON OUTLINES

endured the contradiction of sinners as God's supreme revelation, and urges them to hold fast. He points to those who in the past, not having seen the promises fulfilled, stayed the course, then running out of time and space he speaks of those who have endured terrible things by faith, and those who have achieved tremendous things by faith. Now it is your turn, "Run the race with patience . . ."

I. THE RACE

- A. This is not about insignificant school-yard games. The picture is of the final of the hundred meters in the Olympic Games. There is an intensity, an agony about the race—a race that calls forth all of the power of man.
- B. So in the spiritual. It is not a mere believism, but an entering into a life that makes demands upon one. This is in harmony with Scripture. Paul speaks of wrestling, of boxing; Jesus speaks of striving. Being a Christian and going on with God calls for exertion, effort.

II. THE REGULATIONS

These are threefold, two are negative and one is positive:

- A. Lay aside every weight. Anything that hinders one in running the race, or being the kind of Christian that God expects.
- B. Lay aside the sin. Hebrews 11, the chapter of faith; sin against faith is unbelief. "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in you an evil heart of unbelief" (Heb. 3:12).
- C. Run with patience. The same word that is translated "endured" in Heb. 10:36. A long distance race—many start, not all finish.

III. THE RULE

"Looking unto Jesus." Two words stand out in our text: "Seeing" and "Looking."

- A. Seeing is a general sweep of the eyes. The runner as he races sees the crowds but no one in particular.
- B. Looking is specific. Run while looking specifically at Christ.
- C. He is the Author, that is File

Leader—the One who has gone before and will lead us into victory. To look or to follow anyone else is to fail.

IV. THE REWARD

"Who for the joy . . ." In the days when this Epistle was written, it was a laurel wreath that would have perished in a day or two.

- A. Today it is a gold medal. To obtain this, athletes will be ever seeking to bring their bodies into subjection. Yet only one receives the coveted gold.
- B. Not so for the Christian. Each faithful disciple can receive the crown of righteousness.

—Leonard McNeil
Ashton-under-Tyne,
England

AND JESUS TAUGHT THEM, SAYING . . .

Scripture: Luke 8:16-18

INTRODUCTION:

1. Our lesson: the parable of the candle, following Jesus' discourse on the sower.
2. This was one of His favorite illustrations.
 - a. In Matthew 5 He spoke of the candle as the Christian's light.
 - b. In Luke 11, He spoke of a person's ability to perceive truth. Thus the lighting of a candle is like keeping one's eyes wide open to truth.
3. Jesus uses the same illustration as He explains God's purpose to enlighten His people.
 - a. God lights a candle and places it on a candlestick to reveal all things, leaving nothing hidden.
 - b. Thus in verse 18, Jesus exhorts: "Take heed therefore how ye hear."
4. We note also that this parable has much in common with the parable of the sower.

I. JESUS SAYS, "NO MAN LIGHTS A CANDLE AND THEN COVERS IT UP."

- A. Jesus was logical
 1. No person of intelligence

would bother to light a lamp and then cover it.

2. There must be a definite purpose for lighting a lamp.
- B. Jesus had an important point to make with this statement.
 1. If men of intelligence would not light a lamp without a purpose, surely an all-wise God would not do so.
 2. The lamp represents revealed truth, and God does not impart truth purposelessly.
 3. He means everything He says.
- C. Jesus declares that God has a purpose for every word He speaks to us.
 1. He expects us to listen and respond as He speaks.
 2. His light is held up high for us to see truth.

II. JESUS SAYS, "FOR NOTHING IS SECRET THAT SHALL NOT BE MANIFEST."

- A. God's searching light is penetrating. No truth that we need to know is hidden from us.
- B. God shows us truth about himself.
 1. His love for us (John 3:16)
 2. His grace and mercy
 3. His power
- C. God shows us truth about ourselves.
 1. Our lost condition, if unsaved
 2. Our need for cleansing
- D. God shows us how to live a victorious Christian life.

III. JESUS WARNS (VERSE 18): "TAKE HEED THEREFORE, HOW YOU HEAR" (or, "Pay attention to what you hear").

- A. If we respond to God's offer, God keeps on giving.
- B. If we fail to respond, God may withdraw His offer.

CONCLUSION:

1. When a farmer sows seed in a field, it is his purpose to reap a harvest.
2. When God reveals His truth to us, He expects us to apply His truth to our lives.

—Loren W. Gould
Virginia Beach,
Virginia

OLD TESTAMENT WORD STUDIES



by Charles Isbell

God's Justice—Mai. 2:17—3:5 "you have wearied" (2:17)

The word is *hōga 'tem*, commonly used to express the idea of making someone sweat or work very hard. Here it is the complaints of the people, their "words," which have tired God.

"in that you say" (2:17)

The preposition *b* before the infinitive here functions as a temporal adverb conjunction. Read, "When you say."

"delights" (2:17)

Or, takes pleasure. This is the opposite of being wearied or caused to toil over harsh words.

"Justice" (2:17)

Hebrew *mishpāt*. This is the key word in the entire passage. Here the people appear to be saying that they desire God to demonstrate His justice (or righteous judgment). In 3:5, God's messenger does come to the Temple for the purpose of judging (NASB "for judgment" should be read "for justice"; *mishpāt* occurs both places). However, His coming reveals all kinds of sin, immorality, and, particularly, absence of social justice among members of the community of faith. Thus the justice which the people desire (2:17) is something other than what God's presence would reveal (3:5).

"my messenger" (3:1)

Hebrew *mal'ākī*, Malachi. This verse indicates that Malachi was not a proper name but a common name, "my messenger." The author of the book is unknown.

"the lord" (3:1)

This is not *YHWH* but *'ādôn*,

a common word for a noble person or aristocrat, but also a general term of address for anyone. In this verse "the lord" (*hā'ādôn*) is equated with both the messenger being sent and "the messenger of the covenant." Thus it is wrong to assume two beings here, first a messenger but then God himself. Notice the structure of the entire verse.

Behold I am sending my messenger and he shall clear the way before me. Suddenly shall come to his Temple, the lord whom you seek, even the messenger of the covenant in which you delight. Behold he is coming.

All referents are third person. *Yahweh* is speaking (note the end of the verse) about another one throughout. The double "behold" phrase provides a chiasmic frame for the verse and serves to identify the coming one as messenger, lord, and covenantal herald.

"endure" (3:2)

KJV "abide" has been immortalized by Handel. But the meaning of Hebrew *kūl* here (normally used to mean "comprehend" or "contain") must be determined in parallel with the other expressions. Clearly the idea being expressed is that no one can stand "when he appears," no one can *survive* (in sin and impurity specified in 3:5) in the fiery presence of this one coming to refine and purify.

"fullers' soap" (3:2)

Lit., "soap of cleansers," i.e., the strong alkali soap (*borit*) used by professional garment cleaners. But these latter were not "laundrymen" in the modern sense as the NASB marginal note

implies. Rather, their task was to cleanse garments so as to make them fit for cultic use. Note the description of the garments of the transfigured Jesus given in Mark 9:3.

"purify" (3:3)

Hebrew *thr* also always carries cultic implications. Thus the Levites would be refined-fulled (=cleansed)—purified for the purpose of being made fit to perform their tasks as religious and spiritual leaders. This task is here defined as presenting an offering "righteously" or correctly to God. Purity of the minister (Levite) was thus a prerequisite for correct ritual and acceptable worship of God.

Notes on 3:5

The coming of the messenger is now described as fulfilling a purpose which goes beyond the merely ritualistic or formal. That purpose is "justice," the very element of God's being which the people had questioned (see 2:17). As so often in prophetic literature, the justice with which God is concerned is *social*. To be judged are those who exploit others merely because they are powerful enough to do so, those who seek out widows, orphans, aliens, and other weaker, more defenseless persons. James 1:27 should be recalled in this context, in addition to the numerous Old Testament passages which link two or more of these weaker groups together (e.g., Deut. 14:29; 16:11, 14; 24:12, 13; Ps. 78:65; Isa. 1:17; Jer. 7:6; 23:3; Ezek. 22:7; Zech. 7:10). In most of the references cited, God himself acts to become the protector of the weak and oppressed.



NEW TESTAMENT WORD STUDIES

by Ralph Earle

Matthew 17

Transfigure (17:2)

The Greek verb is *metamorphoo*. It is compounded of the preposition *meta* and the noun *morphe* (which means "form"). The idea is that of changing over from one form to another.

The verb occurs only four times in the New Testament, always in the passive. Here and in the parallel passage (Mark 9:2) it describes a transformation that was outwardly visible. Luke, in his account of the Transfiguration, does not use the verb, but writes of Jesus: "As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning" (9:29).

In the other two places where *metamorphoo* occurs (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18), it describes an inner, invisible, spiritual transformation. (See the comments there in *Word Meanings in the New Testament*.)

Regarding the transfiguration experience, Johannes Behm writes: "Before the eyes of His most intimate disciples the human appearance of Jesus was for a moment changed into that of a heavenly being in the transfigured world. This is the anticipation and guarantee of an eschatological reality" (*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, IV, 758). The transfiguration of Jesus is the divine assurance to us that we who are in Christ will someday be transformed into His glory.

"Tabernacle" or "Shelter"?(17:4)

The Greek word is *skene*, which J. H. Thayer says means a tent or tabernacle "made of green boughs, or skins, or other materials" (*Lexicon*, p. 577). It would surely have to be the first of these three on the mountain. Today a "tabernacle" is usually a large building of wood or brick. A "tent" is normally made of cloth, or possibly animal skins. Peter couldn't "make" either one of these. What he could make of green boughs we would call a "shelter" (NIV).

The word occurs 20 times in the New Testament, half of these in Hebrews—most of them there in reference to the ancient Tabernacle made at Sinai. Because of this dominant usage, the NASB has in the margin: "or, *sacred tents*." But would there be a sanctuary to Moses and to Elijah? Peter's preceding words, "It is good for us to be here," suggests simply that he wanted to stay there and continue to enjoy the high moment of divine glory.

"Listed" or "Wished"?(17:12)

This is one of the 830 words in the King James Version that have changed their meanings since 1611. Today "listed" means "included in a list."

The Greek word is *thelo*. It has two meanings: "wish," expressing desire; and "will," expressing purpose. Of the 209 times it oc-

curs in the New Testament, it is translated "will" (or "would") 174 times ("list" only three times, here, Mark 9:13, John 3:8).

"Lunatic" or "An epileptic" (17:15)

In the Greek it is the verb *seleniazomai*, which in the New Testament is used only by Matthew (here and in 4:24). Literally, it means "be moon-struck"—from *selene*, "moon." Of course, our word "lunatic" comes from the Latin *luna*, "moon." Thayer defines the verb as meaning "to be epileptic (epilepsy being supposed to return and increase with the increase of the moon)" (*Lexicon*, p. 573).

"Tribute Money" (17:24)

The Greek has *ta didrachma*, "the double drachmas." The word occurs only here in the New Testament.

Arndt and Gingrich give a clear explanation of *didrachmon* (singular): "a double drachma, two drachma piece, a coin worth two Attic drachmas, normally worth about 36 cents in our money; it was about equal to a half shekel among the Jews, and was the sum required of each person annually as the temple tax" (*Lexicon*, p. 191). That is why the NIV has "the two-drachma tax" here, and then words the question that follows: "Doesn't your teacher pay the temple tax?" More literally the NASB has "the two-drachma tax" in both places.



CLERGY QUIZ

1. Epiphany has been associated with:
 - A. Baptism of new converts
 - B. The 12th day of Christmas
 - C. The adoration of the Magi
 - D. All of the above
2. The editor of *Christianity Today* is:
 - A. Alfred E. Neuman
 - B. Martin E. Marty
 - C. Daniel Poling
 - D. Kenneth S. Kantzer
3. "Virtue, glory, honor, all things human and divine, are slaves to riches" comes from a book called *Satires*. It was written by:
 - A. Joaquin Miller
 - B. Erasmus
 - C. Horace
 - D. Francis Bacon
4. The visit of the wise men is recorded in the book of:
 - A. Mark
 - B. John
 - C. Luke
 - D. Matthew
5. The first step in preparing to preach from the Old Testament, according to Charles Isbell's article in this magazine is:
 - A. Establishing a working text
 - B. Selecting a passage
 - C. Determining functions
 - D. Making a theological affirmation
6. The theme of 2 Peter chapter 3 has to do with:
 - A. The Second Advent
 - B. Fiery trials
 - C. Faith righteousness
 - D. The Christian and the government
7. Which of the following have written books on evangelism?
 - A. George Sweazey
 - B. Robert Coleman
 - C. Dorian Clay
 - D. All of the above
 - E. "A" and "B" but not "C"
8. Which of the following pairs would have the least to argue about if assigned to debate against each other?
 - A. Sigmund Freud and Harold Glasser
 - B. Seward Hiltner and Carl Rogers
 - C. B. F. Skinner and Abraham Maslow
9. Which of the following was a missionary to India?
 - A. David Livingstone
 - B. Charles Tracy
 - C. Bo Belinsky
 - D. William Carey
10. Jesus is called "the heav'n born Prince of Peace" in which of the following songs?
 - A. Joy to the World
 - B. The First Noel
 - C. Hark, the Herald Angels Sing
11. Which of the following does *not* belong in this list?
 - A. Finley Edge
 - B. Larry Richards
 - C. John Sisemore
 - D. William Carlos Williams
 - E. John Westerhoff
 - F. Sara Little
12. A theology of Christian education founded on the idea of God as Educator, Jesus the Exemplar, and the Holy Spirit as Tutor was written by:
 - A. Elwood Sanner
 - B. Nels Ferré
 - C. Randolph Crump Miller
 - D. Lois LeBar
13. The "proposition" of a sermon has to do with:
 - A. The thesis or theme
 - B. The peroration
 - C. The invitation
 - D. The exordium
14. "A mighty fortress is our God, A bulwark never failing" came from the pen of:
 - A. Euripedes
 - B. John Calvin
 - C. Charles Wesley
 - D. Martin Luther
 - E. Matthew Arnold
 - F. Thomas Fuller
15. The metaphor describing the transitory character of human existence used in Isa. 40:6; 1 Pet. 1:24; and Jas. 1:10 is:
 - A. A wind-blown cloud
 - B. Grass
 - C. A vapor
 - D. A flame

RATING SCALE

- 14-15 correct: Better than most
 12-13 correct: A little better than most
 9-11 correct: Most
 7- 8 correct: Worse than most
 0- 6 correct: Mostly worse

9—D; 10—C; 11—D; 12—B; 13—A; 14—D; 15—B.
 1—D; 2—D; 3—C; 4—D; 5—B; 6—A; 7—E; 8—B;

ANSWERS



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